

THE APPLICATION OF PREVAILING  
PRINCIPLES OF ELOCUTION TO THEATRICAL  
CRITICISM OF AMERICAN ACTING: 1815-1840

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	11
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Chapter	
I. ELOCUTIONARY BASES OF AMERICAN THEATRICAL CRITICISM . . . . .	19
II. STANDARDS OF PRONUNCIATION REQUIRED OF THE ACTOR ON THE AMERICAN STAGE . . . . .	38
III. CRITICISM OF THE ACTOR'S VOCAL TECHNIQUE . . . .	57
IV. PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF AMERICAN ACTING . . . . .	83
V. PORTRAYAL OF EMOTION AS A FACTOR IN AMERICAN ACTING . . . . .	107
VI. FIDELITY TO NATURE IN AMERICAN ACTING . . . . .	127
VII. SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ACTING STYLES AND TECHNIQUES WHICH PREVAILED ON THE AMERICAN STAGE . . . . .	155
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	165



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to analyze the acting techniques described by theatrical critics in periodicals published in the United States from 1815 to 1840. This analysis will attempt to isolate those aspects of the actor's delivery which received critical attention, and establish their relationship to the standards developed by teachers of elocution for criticizing these same aspects in the delivery of public speakers, oral readers, and at times actors.

Since the materials basic to this study are drawn from a singular type of dramatic criticism, it is necessary, first of all, to evaluate this kind of criticism as a justifiable source for a study and definition of acting techniques. Admittedly, dramatic criticism is not only difficult to define, but its limits cannot be set in such a way as to be accepted universally. To Littlewood, the term "dramatic criticism" includes "everything written or said about the theatre."<sup>1</sup> Spingarn takes the point of view that it is not necessary to know anything of the theatre in order to understand the drama of an age.<sup>2</sup> Charles H. Gray, on the other hand, distinguishes between two methods of criticizing drama by using the terms "theatrical criticism" and "dramatic criticism." The "theatrical critic" looks at drama as it is performed in the theatre,

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel R. Littlewood, "Dramatic Criticism," The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, ed. Phyllis Hartnoll (London, 1951), p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>J. E. Spingarn, Creative Criticism (New York, 1917), p. 53.

while the "dramatic critic" considers the play apart from its theatrical presentation and bases his criticism solely on his reading of it. Gray notes:

Some dramatic critics may prefer to read plays under the more quiet condition of a private study--as Charles Lamb said he preferred to read Shakespeare--it is perhaps not too much to assert that the play which is being thus criticized is quite a different thing from that which the theatrical critic sees produced in the theatre, nor to assert that the values which the play possesses in the theatre, belong of right to the full work of art. Certainly it is to the many-sided art of the theatre that the theatrical critic of our periodicals must devote himself. . . . Theatrical criticism, then, is a species of writing with peculiar interests and values.<sup>3</sup>

It would appear, then, that the breadth of the term "dramatic criticism" permits the recognition of two basic types of critical opinion, a literature-oriented criticism and a "theatrical" or performance-oriented criticism such as that employed in this study. In his consideration of what dramatic criticism should or should not emphasize, A. C. Ward calls attention to certain factors which invite a further limitation of this latter area and, in essence, recommends a concentration of emphasis on critical evaluations of the actor's product. He believes that, since the first World War, dramatic criticism has shown a tendency to become "stubbornly literary" in that the playwright's work receives too much attention at the expense of the actor's contribution. To Ward, drama is "a composite art born in the theatre," and is only germinally existent in the playwright's mind.<sup>4</sup> The lack of this "more

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<sup>3</sup>Charles H. Gray, Theatrical Criticism in London to 1795 (New York, 1931), pp. 1-2.

<sup>4</sup>Alfred C. Ward, Specimens of English Dramatic Criticism, XVII-XX Centuries (London, 1945), p. 19.

comprehensive and satisfying kind of criticism" he attributes to the fact that the critics have followed Aristotle's example too closely and neglected "the actor and the visual aspects of the theatrical art." Ward admits that Aristotle's kind of criticism served the purpose of Greek drama adequately since theatrical performance in that day was primarily an act of worship in which the actor became a "celebrant . . . whose activity and personality merge in his office and consequently are of no account apart from it." He points out, however, the secular character of modern drama subordinates the "thing done and its metaphysical implications" to the "manner of doing and the personal capacity of the doer." In modern drama, then, the actor's performance becomes much more important, and the actor himself becomes a "creator" and not merely an "interpreter."<sup>5</sup> While not denying the existence and importance of "literary" dramatic criticism, Ward would have it known that it is equally important to assess the playwright's capacity to translate that material into living terms. However, he notes:

This view . . . may not command general assent, for writers have long exercised an awful authority, and so long as critics are themselves drawn from the literary fold that authority will not be seriously shaken. But there is a good case for attempting to shake it when the dramatic critic neglects the unique thing he should do for the familiar thing he need not do. Each generation can and will undertake its own literary criticism, but when an actor is dead every word of comment by his contemporaries becomes precious. What would we not give for an adequate account by an eye-witness of a performance during the festival of Dionysus at Athens in the fifth century, B. C., of a Shakespeare performance during the author's lifetime, or even of certain later occasions in the history of the theatre.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Theatrical criticism, therefore, has its own raison d'etre as well as literary dramatic criticism, and the theatrical criticism which embodies eye-witness accounts of actors and their acting techniques becomes an invaluable source to the student who would attempt to recreate the actor's performance of a past era.

This study of American theatrical criticism during the twenty-five year period following the end of the War of 1812 is limited, therefore, to that which deals with the actor and the techniques of his performance. Indeed, there was little for the theatrical critic to write about except the actor. As Freedley and Reeves state, "New plays were not frequently produced and the audience attended the playhouse to judge the relative merits of the acting. It was an era of rivalries."<sup>7</sup> Extant theatre records testify to the fact that the same plays were produced over and over, thus enabling the playgoers to know them almost as well as the actors, and lending credence to the critics's remarks that it was unnecessary to say anything of the play itself, since the readers were certainly familiar with it.<sup>8</sup>

The choice of the dates, 1815 to 1840, is not so arbitrary as to preclude a relationship to the study of acting techniques. There are several considerations which mark this period as an age that lends itself to a study. The first of these considerations is that it has been generally neglected. To be sure, George Odell delved deeply into this body of

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<sup>7</sup>George Freedley and John A. Reeves, A History of the Theatre (New York, 1941), p. 303.

<sup>8</sup>See, for instance, the New York Mirror and Ladies' Literary Gazette, October 10, 1829, p. 110.

theatrical criticism in his history of the New York stage, but not for the purpose of analyzing acting techniques. His major concern was to produce a chronicle of theatre events.<sup>9</sup> Historians and critics of drama have appeared reluctant to admit to their histories and critiques any study of theatrical criticism, and those who mention it at all tend to set the beginning of American dramatic criticism in the 1840's with the dramatic opinions of Poe and Whitman. Others consider nothing prior to 1870.<sup>10</sup> Barrett H. Clark, for example, records no American dramatic criticism prior to 1900, dismissing nineteenth-century criticism as mere accounts of acting and staging, and implying that, since no "dramatic theories" were developed, such criticism was not worth including.<sup>11</sup> Moses and Brown represent the period with only two examples of theatrical criticism, both from the New York Evening Post.<sup>12</sup> The research of Merrill Christophersen indicates, however, that significant criticism was published prior to 1840, the terminal date of this study.<sup>13</sup> He notes also that of its three main categories, "literary," "moralistic," and "theatrical," the latter, which deals with the actor's performance, comprises the largest part of that criticism. It would appear, then, that

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<sup>9</sup>George C. D. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage (15 vols.; New York, 1927-1949), I, xi.

<sup>10</sup>Merrill G. Christophersen, "Early American Dramatic Criticism," Southern Speech Journal, XXI (Spring, 1956), 195.

<sup>11</sup>Barrett H. Clark, European Theories of the Drama with a Supplement on the American Drama (New York, 1947), p. 485.

<sup>12</sup>Montrose J. Moses and John Mason Brown, The American Theatre as Seen by Its Critics 1752-1934 (New York, 1934), pp. 48-59.

<sup>13</sup>Christophersen, Southern Speech Journal, XXI, 196.



the period in question possesses a body of critical materials which, although normally overlooked, can be employed to provide an insight into the theatre of the time, and especially the acting techniques peculiar to it.

The chief justification for the study of acting in this period rests on the fact that it is not only a period of great actors and great acting, but also one in which the native American actor began to achieve stardom and to be recognized both at home and abroad. Freedley and Reeves call the period from 1815 to 1905, "America's Age of Actors."<sup>14</sup> During the period from 1815 to 1840, the roster of stars appearing at the Park Theatre in New York, which, at that time, represented the acme of theatrical entertainment in this country,<sup>15</sup> serves as an indication of this trend. The year 1815 marks the beginning of a period which Odell describes as follows:

This period showed to the New York public a succession of great performers probably never since equalled--a list including Edmund Kean, Macready, Malibran, Junius Brutus Booth, the elder Mathews, Charles Kean, Charles and Fanny Kemble, James and Henry Wallack, Dowton, Hackett, Cooper, Mr. and Mrs. Hamblin, John Vandenhoff, Charlotte Cushman, Placide, Fanny Elssler, Ellen Tree--the very noblest of the players and singers and dancers of the past.<sup>16</sup>

Not only was the period one in which many great English and European actors made their debuts in the United States, but it was also a period in which the American star began to emerge. Edwin Forrest made

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<sup>14</sup>Freedley and Reeves, History of the Theatre, p. 303.

<sup>15</sup>Glenn Hughes, A History of the American Theatre 1700-1950 (New York, 1951), p. 90.

<sup>16</sup>Odell, Annals, II, 446.

his New York debut in 1826, after making his first appearance at the age of fourteen at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theatre. The same year James H. Hackett, who later achieved fame as the best Falstaff both in England and America, made his bow on the New York stage.<sup>17</sup> Charlotte Cushman, another native American, made her debut in New York ten years later. The influence of this period did much to form her technique, even though her career belongs principally to a later time. The period from 1815 to 1840, when viewed in terms of the great actors and the American stars who emerged to achieve fame in their own country and abroad, offers a wealth of material for the study of acting techniques.

The period from 1815 to 1840 also falls within what histories and criticisms of American letters call the "National Period," a designation given to a time when the country began to establish itself as a political, social, and cultural entity.<sup>18</sup> With the feeling that the nation could maintain itself among the powers of the world, a genuine American spirit began to pervade the politics, society, and literature of the country. Following the War of 1812, the nation's periodicals reflected the growing feeling that America could develop its own literature free from foreign influence.<sup>19</sup>

Charvat has pointed to a similar unity in literary production between 1810 and 1835, claiming that "within its [the period's] limits,

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<sup>17</sup>Walter Pritchard Eaton in Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. "Forrest, Edwin."

<sup>18</sup>Edwin Harrison Cady, Frederick J. Hoffman and Roy Harvey Pearce, The Growth of American Literature (2 vols.; New York, 1956), I, 231.

<sup>19</sup>John C. McGloskey, "The Campaign of the Periodicals after the War of 1812 for a National American Literature," Publications of the Modern Language Association, L (1935), 262.

Bryant, Dana, Percival, Halleck, and Drake produced their most important poetry; Cooper, Irving, and Paulding their best fiction; Payne, Barker, and Bird their best plays."<sup>20</sup> The advent of this "national" spirit not only resulted in an elevation of the state of American literary drama between 1815 and 1840, but in the growth and development in other theatrical areas as well.

The period encompasses a growth pattern and a resurgence of interest in the theatre which Odell characterizes as the "Palmy Days" of the American theatre.<sup>21</sup> Proof of this fact can be found by comparing the public's attitude toward the theatre at the beginning of the period with that which prevailed at its height. In 1817, when the American Monthly Magazine began its department called "The Thespian Register," the critic was forced to offer an apologia for such an undertaking, saying, in part:

We have thought it necessary to say this much in vindication of theatrical entertainments, because we are aware that many good people indulge in a prejudice against them. We are induced to notice the performances on the New York boards in the hope of purging from our stage those impurities which have given too strong grounds for those prejudices.<sup>22</sup>

In April of 1826, however, the critic on the New York Mirror noted that all classes of society were then to be found within the walls of a playhouse,<sup>23</sup> and later that season, on October 28, it was

<sup>20</sup>William Charvat, The Origins of American Critical Thought 1810-1835 (Philadelphia, 1936), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup>Odell, Annals, II, 446.

<sup>22</sup>American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review [ed. H. Biglow], May, 1817, p. 51.

<sup>23</sup>New York Mirror, April 1, 1826, p. 287.



estimated that the attendance the previous Monday evening at the four theatres in New York totaled eight thousand.<sup>24</sup> By 1827, the Mirror had to employ a second reviewer, since it was impossible for one person to cover all the theatrical productions then currently running.<sup>25</sup> In June of 1836, the London correspondent for the Albion wrote his magazine that "No people on earth patronize theatrical talent as well as the Americans."<sup>26</sup> Further testimony to the popularity of the theatre at this time may be found in records of the money which the star actors took in on their benefit nights. The popularity of the theatre was such that the star actor, in contrast to the artists and literary figures who found it difficult to make a living from the practice of their art,<sup>27</sup> not only found it possible to make a living in the theatre, but often acquired considerable wealth. In 1833, the Mirror reported that Cooper's "recent benefit" was the largest on record, netting \$4,500, while on other occasions Payne had received "\$4,200 and Dunlap \$3,194.50."<sup>28</sup> The magazine went on to compare these amounts with the \$3,277.77 which represented the largest amount Kean received at the Drury Lane Theatre, and with the \$2,802.50 which represented the most that the great Talma had ever amassed at the Theatre Francaise.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., October 28, 1826, p. 111.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., November 24, 1827, p. 159.

<sup>26</sup>The Albion, or British, Colonial, and Foreign Weekly, June 25, 1836, p. 207. For similar statements see the Mirror, September 10, 1836, p. 86.

<sup>27</sup>Charvat, Origins, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup>New York Mirror, November 23, 1833, p. 167.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

While these and similar reports identify the period as one of distinctive theatrical growth, it should be noted that its end corresponds to a leveling off and decline in that interest and growth. By 1838, the Mirror was noting the "frequent closings of the minor theatres."<sup>30</sup> The following year the same journal reported that the season at the Park was a losing one, but held out hopes for the next season.<sup>31</sup> The critic's hopes did not materialize, however, and he was forced to record that "in this city, the headquarters of the drama, the season has been particularly inauspicious."<sup>32</sup> Other periodicals, such as the Boston Dial, in 1842, noted without regret the coldness of the public to theatrical exhibitions, since it appeared that drama and the histrionic art seemed dead or dying.<sup>33</sup> By 1845, the Broadway Journal reported that readers cared nothing about gossip of theatres and that dramatic entertainment was not popular.<sup>34</sup> Later in the decade, the Literary World said the year 1847 marked a low point of depression for the New York stage.<sup>35</sup> By the beginning of the forties, then, a period of theatre popularity and growth had come full circle, thus establishing a natural terminal point for this study.

<sup>30</sup>New York Mirror, February 10, 1838, p. 262.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., February 2, 1839, p. 256.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., February 29, 1840, p. 286.

<sup>33</sup>Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines 1741-1850 (New York, 1930), p. 430.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

Another problem which the student of acting faces involves the necessity for finding first-hand, eye-witness accounts of what the actor actually did to receive the plaudits of critic and audience. Some of this criticism is to be found in biographies of actors, in theatrical reminiscences of actors, managers, and historians, and in accounts of their techniques by the actors themselves. Caution must be exercised, however, in the employment of such materials, since the biographer may be biased in his opinion,<sup>36</sup> or he may never have seen the actor perform at all. Actors have achieved reputations as "acting giants" on the basis of accounts handed down from generation to generation, although criticism written during the actor's lifetime does not provide a basis for such reputation.<sup>37</sup>

In order to avoid these difficulties, the sources employed in this study have been limited to those theatrical criticisms of acting found in the general periodicals published in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia between 1815 and 1840. Since this period may claim the appellation of a "golden age of magazines,"<sup>38</sup> and since the magazines reflect other factors of the age so well,<sup>39</sup> it may be expected that these periodicals will effectively mirror the theatre's role in the life of the time, and reflect the standards which the audience and critic

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<sup>36</sup>As was perhaps true of William R. Alger's Life of Forrest (Philadelphia, 1877). On this point, see Montrose J. Moses, The Fabulous Forrest (Boston, 1929), pp. vii-ix.

<sup>37</sup>Odell, III, 87-88.

<sup>38</sup>Mott, History of American Magazines, pp. 524-25.

<sup>39</sup>See above, p. 9.

demanded of its players. Furthermore, we may expect a generally unprejudiced view of the actor from these critics who went to the theatre night after night, saw all the great actors in all their great roles, compared one with the other, and even at times fearlessly pointed out "improprieties" in their performances.

Perhaps the most authoritative study of this type of source material has been Frank Luther Mott's study of American magazines. Certainly his study can claim pre-eminence from the standpoint of its analytical examination of the content of American magazines.<sup>40</sup> He has pointed to the fact that the quarter century prior to 1825 was characterized by the rise of "special class periodicals," among which were those devoted to the theatre.<sup>41</sup> These theatrical publications, however, were generally short-lived. In the period following 1825, few theatrical journals were published, and theatrical criticism was, for the most part, left to the general periodicals and newspapers.<sup>42</sup>

New York was rapidly becoming the publishing center of the country during this period. By mid-century the census reports were giving the annual circulations of New York periodicals as fifty per cent higher than those of Boston or Philadelphia.<sup>43</sup> Not only were these cities the major centers for the publishing of periodicals, they

<sup>40</sup>It is the "standard history of the magazine," and "furnishes foundations studies and analyses for both general and special reference." See Robert E. Spiller et al., eds., Literary History of the United States: Bibliography (New York, 1948), p. 69.

<sup>41</sup>Mott, History of American Magazines, p. 165.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 427.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 375-80.

were also the leading centers for theatrical activity, with theatrical leadership passing from Philadelphia to New York sometime between 1800 and 1825.<sup>44</sup> Although the actors travelled extensively to Richmond and Charleston, and even to New Orleans and the West, Boston, Philadelphia, and New York remained the nucleus of their activities. Given the supremacy of these centers in the publishing and theatrical fields, and the preeminence of their periodicals in theatrical criticism, it would appear reasonable to assume that the periodicals published in these cities reflect the best in criticism of the acting of the period. It is certain that those actors who gained any sort of reputation eventually found their way to one or all of these cities and were consequently described by the critics writing for the periodicals. Such criticism, even limited in this way, will enable the student to check the critics' opinions in Boston against those in New York and Philadelphia. He may thus be able to arrive at standards generally prevailing and to eliminate, to some degree, the personal biases of the critics.

With Mott's recommendations of periodicals carrying the best theatrical criticism of this period as a guide, it would appear that the theatrical scene is best reflected in the following periodicals. The theatre in Boston may be covered with the American Monthly Magazine (1829-1831) and the New England Galaxy and Masonic Magazine (1817-1834). The New York scene may be represented by the theatrical criticism appearing in the Albion: A Journal of News, Politics, and Literature (1822-1876), the American Monthly Magazine (1833-1838), the American

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<sup>44</sup>Hughes, History of the American Theatre, p. 90.

Monthly Magazine and Critical Review (1817-1819), and the New York Mirror and Ladies' Literary Gazette (1823-1842). For the theatre in Philadelphia, the American Quarterly Review (1827-1843), Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine (1837-1840), and the Port Folio (1801-1827) give the best coverage.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond the problems of establishing time limits and sources suitable for a study of acting, it becomes necessary to consider still another factor. Acting is not an easy subject to discuss. A part of the difficulty arises from the fact that, although they may have changed their content and meaning in the meantime, terms which presumably identify or characterize styles of acting are handed down from generation to generation. In an attempt to illuminate an acting style of the past, a latter-day critic may assign to these terms meanings which have been acquired in his own day. The reputation of the elder Booth, for instance, could hardly have been based on the judgment of his contemporary critics.<sup>46</sup> The eighteenth and nineteenth century critics' use of the terms "natural" or "realistic" in describing the acting of Garrick, Edmund Kean, or Edwin Booth does not authorize the modern critic to place their acting styles in the framework of present-day naturalistic acting. The student of acting may avoid such difficulties by taking into consideration only eye-witness accounts of actors. But even these accounts do not always solve the problems involved in the process of characterizing so evanescent a thing as acting. The actor leaves

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<sup>45</sup>Mott, History of American Magazines, pp. 165-57; 427.

<sup>46</sup>Odell, Annals, III, 87.



behind him no concrete product by which the future critic or historian can test the meanings of the terms which represent judgments on his actual performance. If the critic is to illuminate the histrionic art of another age, he must discover a set of criteria belonging to that age, a set of criteria which will provide an understanding of the nature of its standards of excellence.

If we accept Paul Kozelka's view that the standard criterion for good acting in any age seems to be the extent to which the actor moved his audience,<sup>47</sup> the method which the critic adopts for the study of acting must be one which will reveal what it was the actor did when he moved his audience, and what standards the actor had to satisfy before audiences put the stamp of excellence on his acting. Failure to employ these standards to discover the meanings of the terms and labels used in the original evaluation of an actor's product may produce the same weakness which George Kernodle has discovered in Helen Ormsbee's history of acting.<sup>48</sup> He points out that she did little to clarify the nature of early acting as a result of assuming, in spite of her discovery that every age has considered its good actors as "realistic," that "formal" and "realistic" represent two opposing methods of acting techniques which prevailed in alternate periods.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Paul Kozelka, "Theatrical and Dramatic Criticism, and Commentaries on Acting," A Selected Bibliography and Critical Comment on the Art, Theory, and Technique of Acting (Ann Arbor, 1948), p. 23.

<sup>48</sup>Kernodle is referring to Helen Ormsbee's Backstage with Actors: from the Time of Shakespeare to the Present Day (New York, 1928).

<sup>49</sup>George Kernodle, "Histories of Acting and Dictionaries of Acting," A Selected Bibliography . . ., p. 5.

In his critical comments on other histories of acting, Kernodle maintains that the method used by Downer, in analyzing nineteenth-century acting, fares somewhat better, since he "uses a few concepts from literary history and criticism to good advantage and makes telling distinctions between several schools and traditions of acting."<sup>50</sup> Kernodle adds that "until we gather more descriptive accounts of actors, it is hard to see how the descriptive method can be carried further." He then goes on to suggest various methods which might be employed in the study of acting: first, "further analysis of aesthetic principles in literature and painting might throw a great deal of light on acting;" second, acting may be approached through a study of theatre conventions; third, a study of "convention--the diagrams of communication" may give the key to what "realism" and "verisimilitude" really meant in each period; and finally by relating what is known of an actor to the plays which were written for him.<sup>51</sup>

The present study of acting proposes to employ a method which might, in Kernodle's terms, be referred to as one using the "diagrams of communication" to illuminate the descriptions of acting styles. Actually a better term might be "paradigms" of communication--to use a term from the critical method of Kenneth Burke. By "paradigm" is meant, not a superimposed, artificial pattern, but rather one which represents (as the paradigm of a verb does) existing patterns prevailing in the communicative system. It had been the work of the elocutionists, for

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.



nearly a century to search out patterns of the spoken language and attempt to describe them in such a way that they would provide criteria of excellence for users of the language. By the time the period of this study opens, the elocutionists had developed a body of principles and rules which they had refined and elaborated. These teachings were widely known and accepted in America. It is not improbable that the critic, as well as the actor, had come under their influence and tended to criticize the actor's delivery in terms developed originally for the criticism of the public speaker's delivery. It may be inferred that, in so far as the critic tends to describe acting styles in the same terms which the elocutionist used in setting standard patterns for the orator to follow, a relationship exists between the two. When critics generally depart from these terms, or modify their criticism in other directions, it is probable that the general acting style has changed or is changing to such an extent that the terms describing the old conventional patterns no longer suffice.

In summary, then, this study proposes to analyze acting styles and techniques as described by the theatrical critics in the periodicals of the three major theatrical and publishing centers of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia from 1815 to 1840. The period has been chosen as one which represents the beginning of many American cultural characteristics, and one in which the theatre developed as an American institution. The period, one of great actors, encouraged the development of a body of theatrical criticism which emphasizes the actor's contribution. This, in itself, makes it a period ideally suited to the study of acting. In view of the difficulties in the study of acting, the method chosen for this

study is one which attempts to apply the conventional patterns of communication described by the elocutionists to the patterns of acting described by the theatrical critic. Such a method, it is hoped, will reveal the meanings of terms as they were used in that day and identify the elements which went to make up a given school of acting.

## CHAPTER I

### ELOCUTIONARY BASES OF AMERICAN THEATRICAL CRITICISM

When attempting to establish or define the acting style of a period on the basis of prevailing communicative patterns, it may be helpful to bear in mind that the relationship between the arts of oratory and acting is an ancient one. Indeed, the origins of the precepts governing both can be traced to a common source. It is perhaps significant that Aristotle placed what comment he had to make about the actor's delivery, not in the Poetics, a treatise on the art of the drama, but in the Rhetoric,<sup>1</sup> a treatise on the art of speaking. After Aristotle, the practice of relating the two arts persisted. As Donald Lemen Clark has remarked, "All who discuss oratorical delivery from Aristotle on are given to referring to its similarity to acting."<sup>2</sup> While ancient actors left no direct written record of their art, their performances, we know, were strongly influenced by the art of oratory. In tracing this relationship, Cole and Chincy have pointed out that

The earliest codified principles of public delivery leaned heavily on the art of Thespis. Precepts for orators, thus derived in part from histrionic practice, were later erroneously adopted in toto by actors. Although we have discarded

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<sup>1</sup>Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1403<sup>b</sup> 31 ff.; 1404<sup>b</sup> 22; 1413<sup>b</sup> 11 ff., 28 ff.; trans. W. Rhys Robert (New York, 1954).

<sup>2</sup>Donald Lemen Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education (New York, 1957), p. 10.

the rhetoricians' books as guides, they still reflect the practice of ancient actors and contain the roots of the actor's tradition.<sup>3</sup>

Cicero showed that he was aware of the affinities existing between the actor's and orator's art of delivery, and was himself instructed by the Roman actor, Roscius.<sup>4</sup> Quintilian based his instruction in voice and gesture on the practice of Roman actors. While Quintilian was careful to differentiate between the arts of acting and oratory, later writers on acting techniques ignored that distinction and based their instruction on his precepts for orators.<sup>5</sup> This Roman tradition, preserved throughout the Dark Ages and brought to England following the Conquest, formed the basis of the English acting tradition.<sup>6</sup> The rhetorical aspects of one phase of this tradition, the Elizabethan, have been treated at length by B. L. Joseph,<sup>7</sup> and it should be noted that Flecknoe's highest praise for the Elizabethan actor, Burbage, was that he possessed "all the parts of an excellent orator. . . ."<sup>8</sup> Betterton, author of one of the earliest manuals for actors and a dominant figure on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage, was said to have derived his precepts from Quintilian.<sup>9</sup> In turn, Betterton's style was replaced by an equally oratorical one which, under the

<sup>3</sup>Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (eds.), Actors on Acting (New York, 1949), p. xcdi.

<sup>4</sup>W. Bridges-Adams, The Irresistible Theatre (London, 1957), p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup>Bridges-Adams, Irresistible Theatre, pp. 9, 196 ff.

<sup>7</sup>B. L. Joseph, Elizabethan Acting (London, 1952).

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 91.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

influence of the French theatre, was marked by "vocal pyrotechnics and exaggerated actions," "musically cadenced speech," and "monotonous declamation."<sup>10</sup> According to Murdoch, before the advent of Garrick, English acting was marked by a mannerism which reflected the old chanting tone of the church and the collegians' concept of Greek and Roman dignity.<sup>11</sup>

The eighteenth century itself became an era when "declamation roared and passion slept."<sup>12</sup> This, the century in which the English elocution movement had its period of greatest development, if not its beginning, was characterized by dramatic criticism which was "mainly concerned with the actor's adherence to tradition handed down from Shakespeare's company,"<sup>13</sup> a tradition already noted for its oratorical aspects. In spite of the widely-hailed "natural style" of Garrick, the critic of the period continued to praise the actor "for preserving the accents and gestures of his predecessors."<sup>14</sup>

It was this acting tradition, with its oratorical trademarks and origins, that the first English actors brought to America and which was preserved through the first part of the nineteenth century. A Boston critic noted that Cooper's performance of Macbeth on November 9, 1818 was <sup>not</sup> "not marred by a single new reading and . . . we observed

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>11</sup>James Murdoch, The Stage or Recollections of Actors and Acting (Cincinnati, 1884), p. 66.

<sup>12</sup>Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 95.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

his rigid adherence to the commonly received punctuation. . . ." |

Indeed, Murdoch describes a "teapot style" of acting still to be found on the American stage in the 1830's. | In this style of acting a chanting tone of voice accompanied the formal gesture of one hand on the hip, the other hand moving in curved lines gradually descending to the side.<sup>15</sup> |

In such a tradition of acting, direct communication with the audience made illusionistic character portrayal impossible, and the actor became a performer, exhibiting himself rather than identifying himself with a character.<sup>16</sup> | The close relationship between this style, in which the actor declaimed his lines directly to the audience, and that of the orator is obvious. It is not surprising then to find the elocutionist of this period holding up the actor as the model which the aspiring orator should imitate, much as Quintilian had done centuries before.

The use of oratorical precepts in a study of nineteenth-century American acting techniques need not, however, rest solely on the basis of the traditional relationship between these two arts. There are other factors in the period from 1815 to 1840 which establish a common ground between the arts of oratory and acting and make an oratorical analysis of theatrical performances not only feasible, but perhaps the best method for determining the components of the acting styles of the time. The acting under consideration, and the descriptions and evaluations of it, originated at a moment in America's cultural history when public performances of actors, orators, oral readers, ministers, lawyers, and

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<sup>15</sup>Murdoch, The Stage, p. 49.

<sup>16</sup>John Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Theatre (New York, 1956), pp. 24-26.



others who had occasion to speak in public were being criticized on the basis of a set of standards put forth by the English elocutionists.<sup>17</sup> This criticism, as it was directed to the orator, became in many cases "dramatic." In his examination of this "dramatic criticism of oratory and of the critics who analyzed oral delivery in the periodicals of nineteenth-century America, Barnett Baskerville came to the conclusion:

Critics admired what it was fashionable to admire, and in a manner acceptable at the time. Speakers obliged by producing oratory of the kind that was admired. Rhetoricians and school-masters observed great orators in action and formulated principles on the basis of what they saw. In such a continuous chain it is impossible to distinguish cause from effect; all were causes and all effects. Each acted on the other, and together they contributed to the forming of public taste, to establish the fashion.<sup>18</sup>

The critic not only respected the fashionable preferences of the audience in the matter of oratorical style, but also reflected other attitudes and points of view peculiar to the age. Among other things, he evidenced concern for "correctness" in language usage. It was a time when the use of language, the actor's and the orator's chief province, was being given increased emphasis and careful scrutiny. Dictionaries and grammars dedicated to "ascertaining" or fixing the language were readily available, while books written by the elocutionists were describing standards for "correct" articulation, pause, force, rate and other aspects of the spoken language. Prior to this time, correct speech had been the prerogative of an aristocratic and cultured group,

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<sup>17</sup>Marie Hochmuth and Richard Murphy, "Rhetorical and Elocutionary Training in Nineteenth-Century Colleges," History of Speech Education, Background Studies, ed. Karl R. Wallace (New York, 1954), pp. 161-162.

<sup>18</sup>Barnet Baskerville, "The Dramatic Criticism of Oratory," Quarterly Journal of Speech [QJS], XLV (February, 1959), 45.

even in America.<sup>19</sup> In the nineteenth century, however, it became an insignia of equality, perhaps on the assumption that he who spoke "correctly" could become the equal of anyone no matter what his rank might be.

This consciousness of language usage was given greater impetus by the notion that one could become a powerful person by becoming an effective speaker. Periodicals, as a result of their frequent references to the power of oratory, were making large segments of the population conscious of the importance of oral skills. Typical of this point of view is one critic's published conviction that love of power is one of the strongest of passions and in free governments, eloquence one of the most honorable means to attain power.<sup>20</sup> The idea that through a command of oratory a person could attain to any position was so pervasive that young men of the day formed "spouting clubs" for the purpose of "reading, debating, and recitation." The opening address, delivered at one newly-formed club, and reprinted in the Mirror, suggests the major theme of these organizations. The speaker, who signed himself "Z," pointed to eloquence as a way to power, insisting that "every office, whether of honour or emolument, is attainable to the eloquent man by perserverance."<sup>21</sup>

The elocutionary orientation of the speaker, actor and critic during this period can perhaps be best understood by examining the age

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Pyles, Words and Ways of American English (New York, 1952), pp. 77-78.

<sup>20</sup>North American Review, VII (July, 1818), 211-215.

<sup>21</sup>New York Mirror, January 21, 1826, p. 206.



itself. The country was expanding, pushing its borders farther westward. A romantic movement, fairly launched during the period, was extending the frontiers of the mind.<sup>22</sup> It was a time which "demanded orators, ministers, lecturers, and actors who could make themselves heard over the noise of a lusty and vociferous populace."<sup>23</sup> Mott, quoting from the New York Review and Athenaeum, suggests the extent to which that demand was satisfied. He notes

How small a part the [orations] are of the works issuing from the European presses, and how large a part of our own. . . . All sorts of public occasions call for these discourses, and orators of all classes and degrees of merit are called upon to deliver them. . . .<sup>24</sup>

Robb has also called attention to the fact that:

The oratory of this period proclaimed the ideals of America and debated her problems; the lyceum popularized the lecture as a form of entertainment combined with instruction; and the theatre, especially in urban centers, became an accepted part of the cultural pattern. When Puritan restraints were somewhat relaxed, the public which had been starved overlong demanded a generous and hearty fare in all public speech.<sup>25</sup>

Commager, in his analysis of the American mind, claims that the American of this era was in many ways spontaneous and not introspective, sentimental and fond of "rolling rhetoric in his orators," and inclined to indulge in "orgies of sentiment" on every Fourth of July and Decoration

<sup>22</sup>Mary Margaret Robb, "The Elocutionary Movement and Its Chief Figures," History of Speech Education, p. 178. See also Henry B. Parkes, The American Experience (2nd ed. rev.; New York, 1947), pp. 149, 187-188.

<sup>23</sup>Robb, in History of Speech Education, p. 179.

<sup>24</sup>Mott, History of American Magazines, pp. 184-185.

<sup>25</sup>Robb, in History of Speech Education, p. 179.

Day.<sup>26</sup> Howard E. Martin, after analyzing the speaking undertaken on these occasions, concluded it helped to "perpetuate and reinforce a peculiar rhetorical tradition and standard of popular eloquence."<sup>27</sup>

This demand for speakers gave rise to a demand for training in elocution. The call was answered by many, among them individuals who, in choosing to become teachers, deserted the professions of medicine and the theatre.<sup>28</sup> James E. Murdoch<sup>29</sup> and George Vandenhoff<sup>30</sup> were actors who turned elocutionists. Lemuel G. White, "a frustrated actor," instructed Forrest, Murdoch, and the "silver-tongued" David Ingersoll in elocution.<sup>31</sup> These actors followed in the tradition of Thomas Sheridan and John Walker, English actors, who had become teachers of elocution and authors of books on the subject. The demand for instruction in the art of elocution was as great or greater in America than in the country of its origin. "Both the purposes and the books which the elocutionists wrote to accomplish them, were eagerly

<sup>26</sup>Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind (New Haven, 1950), p. 24.

<sup>27</sup>Howard H. Martin, "The Fourth of July Oration," QJS, XLIV (December, 1958), 393-401.

<sup>28</sup>Robb, in History of Speech Education, p. 179.

<sup>29</sup>In addition to The Stage, cited above, Murdoch wrote Analytic Elocution (Cincinnati and New York, 1884) A Plea for the Spoken Language (Cincinnati and New York, 1883).

<sup>30</sup>George Vandenhoff, Plain System of Elocution (New York, 1845).

<sup>31</sup>Lawrence Barrett, Edwin Forrest (Boston, 1881), p. 14.

accepted in America,"<sup>32</sup> until inevitably, a group of native writers and teachers was to arise and take over the direction of the movement in this country.

In addition to its demand for actors, orators, and individuals able to instruct in the art of speaking, the period also developed a need for criticism of the acting and the speaking being produced. The periodicals of the time abound in criticisms of actors and orators. Articles in the Boston Galaxy, for instance, demonstrate how widespread the interest in criticism of public speakers was at this time. Pointing out the right of everyone to discuss the excellencies and defects of all public men, to compare their talents and assess their merits, the critic said:

The advocate, the statesman, the preacher, and the judge, are subjects of constant and minute criticism. How Mr. C. or Mr. H. preached, how judge P. or judge J. charged the jury, are the common topics of literary and fashionable conversation and though there may be much bad criticism and many erroneous opinions given, yet, on the whole the disposition of the public to discuss such subjects has many advantages.<sup>33</sup>

Obviously referring to actors, he goes on to say that those whose job it is to amuse must expect that the public will discuss their merits and defects with still more freedom.<sup>34</sup> The following year the Galaxy published a letter from a correspondent who entered his protest at the journal's recent neglect of theatrical entertainments which he liked to read even when he did not agree with them.<sup>35</sup> In 1821, when Kean was to

<sup>32</sup>Frederick W. Haberman, "English Sources of Elocution," History of Speech Education, p. 122.

<sup>33</sup>New England Galaxy, April 17, 1818, n.p.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., (February 5, 1819), n.p.

make his debut in Boston, the critic begged the indulgence of his non-theatre going readers for devoting more space than ordinary to the theatre. He gave as his reason that it was "not likely that another event of equal magnitude, occupying equal portion of public feeling and conversation, producing equal excitement, and generating so many discordant opinions" would occur more than once in the life of an individual editor.<sup>36</sup> The individuals who undertook to satisfy the need or demand for criticism in this speech-dominated period tended to look for an oratorical quality in the dramatic fare to which they gave their attention. Speaking of the theatre in his analysis of popular recreation in the period, Foster Rhea Dulles has noted:

The play necessarily conformed to the taste of the democratic audience. Shakespeare was the favorite vehicle of the stars --and the theatre-going public appears to have hugely enjoyed the dramatic and fervid oratory, "the rant and cant," which marked their acting of the tragedies. It was an age of oratory, of theatricalism. The actors were the rivals of Clay, Calhoun, and Webster, and they had to outdo them at their own trade.<sup>37</sup>

A contemporary critic, reviewing a performance of Charles and Fanny Kemble, reports that Mr. Webster attended the theatre. As soon as he was seated, word was passed along that the great Mr. Webster was in the audience. The critic went on to say:

Soon the audience were turning their eyes, opera-glasses, spectacles on Mr. Webster. We left the theatre with a settled conviction that Miss Kemble, Mr. Kemble, and Mr. Webster were three great persons--and they may gainsay us who please.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Ibid. (February 16, 1821), n.p.

<sup>37</sup>Foster Rhea Dulles, America Learns to Play (New York, 1940), pp. 110-111.

<sup>38</sup>New York Mirror, April 6, 1833, p. 318.

Baskerville, in his study of the criticism of oratory in the period considered in this study, isolated a "dramatic criticism" which he described as one which placed its emphasis upon the speaker rather than the speech and upon the "startling aspects" of the speaker's delivery.<sup>39</sup> The actor, on the other hand, competed with the orator for the audience's favor as a popular idol, and was admired for his oratorical ability. It is likely, therefore, that the elements common to both these arts formed the basis of the criticism of them.

We may then do well to inquire as to the nature of the basic precepts which the critic of acting adopted from the critic of public speaking, and which lent themselves so readily to the criticism of the actor of the time.

From the definition of Thomas Sheridan, we can derive the major elements underlying the spoken product of the period. For nearly a century speakers and teachers accepted as their doctrine his concept of elocution<sup>40</sup> which held that

[ A just delivery consists in a distinct articulation of words, pronounced in proper tones, suitably varied to the sense, and the emotions of the mind; with due observations of accent; of emphasis, in its several gradations; of rests or pauses of the voice, in proper place and well measured degrees of time; and the whole accompanied with expressive looks, and significant gestures.<sup>41</sup> ]

Sheridan was one of the most influential orthoepists of his time, and his dictionary, with its descriptions of the sounds of the language and

<sup>39</sup>Baskerville, QJS, XLV, 45.

<sup>40</sup>Haberman, in History of Speech Education, p. 108.

<sup>41</sup>Thomas Sheridan, A Course of Lectures on Elocution (A new ed., London, 1787), p. 10.



the system of notation which he worked out for indicating them, remained authoritative for more than eighty years, bringing its influence to bear on Noah Webster.

Beyond the doctrine and method of Sheridan, the critics of the period, as the actors themselves, had available elocutionary theory and elocutionary systems that covered numerous phases of the actor's performance. Joshua Steele, for instance, had devised a means of "recording" speech so that it could be reproduced by another speaker. This system of notation for "establishing the melody and measure" of speech indicated not only the sounds composing the individual words, but also the accent, emphasis, quantity, and pause.<sup>42</sup> James Burgh, on the other hand, studied the expression of emotion, the very core of the drama, and put forth the theory that "nature gave to every emotion its outward expression and that from nature the whole art of speaking properly is to be deduced."<sup>43</sup> He drew up a list of the various emotions and attempted to describe the "outward expression" of each. John Walker contributed to the knowledge and standards of vocal inflection which, when employed by speaker or reader, would enable him to speak eloquently in imitation of "beautiful nature."<sup>44</sup> Gilbert Austin provided performers of the period with rules for the use of bodily action in delivery. He attempted to describe exactly every bodily position possible for the

<sup>42</sup>Joshua Steele, An Essay toward Establishing the Melody and Measure of Speech (London, 1775).

<sup>43</sup>James Burgh, The Art of Speaking (London, 1761), p. 12.

<sup>44</sup>John Walker, A Rhetorical Grammar (2nd Am. ed.; Boston, 1822), p. 50.

public speaker, assign each position and gesture a definite use, and record these positions and gestures with a set of symbols which could be inserted into a text, thus giving a speaker or reader a precise gesture and body position which he could assume at every moment in the speech.<sup>45</sup> Whately, whose work also exerted an influence on the oral patterns of the period, insisted upon the "natural manner" in elocution, a manner which he described as one in which the speaker gives no thought to "how a thing is said," but solely to the "sense" of the passage read or spoken.<sup>46</sup> While the preceding standards of effectiveness for the spoken word were derived from English authorities on elocution, the performers of the period also had a body of American theory upon which they could construct their art. One of the most influential of these native elocutionists was Dr. James Rush whose analysis of the voice into its elements was to have far-reaching effects in the work of Jonathan Barber, the actor-teacher James E. Murdoch, and others.<sup>47</sup> Some American elocutionists took issue with the Whately doctrine of "naturalness," as did Ebenezer Porter in whose opinion Whately's advice was wholly useless.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup>Gilbert Austin, Chironomia; or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery (London, 1806), pp. 293-372.

<sup>46</sup>Richard Whately, Elements of Rhetoric (7th ed.; London, 1846), p. 352.

<sup>47</sup>James Rush, The Philosophy of the Human Voice (1st ed.; Philadelphia, 1827); Jonathan Barber, A Grammar of Elocution (New Haven, 1830); Murdoch, Analytic Elocution.

<sup>48</sup>Ebenezer Porter, The Rhetorical Reader (Andover, 1835), p. 16.

An examination of the elocutionary theory prevalent between 1815 and 1840 reveals a concern with oral delivery in reading, as well as in speaking. The elocutionist generally dealt with the delivery of the speaker or reader under five main divisions: pronunciation of words, vocal production and management, bodily activity and gesture, expression of emotion, and how to achieve naturalness. An analysis of the theatrical criticism published in American periodicals between 1815 and 1840 indicates that the theatrical critic based his judgments of the actor's performance on these same elements. It would appear, then, that the five categories established by the elocutionists encompass very well the components of the acting which critics of the period emphasized. Furthermore, the elocutionary precepts for pronunciation, voice, gesture, emotional portrayal, and naturalness would seem particularly suitable to an evaluation of the acting styles which prevailed in the period under review. Not all theatrical critics, of course, emphasized these five elements in the same degree, but practically all relied on them as criteria for determining the actor's excellence or weakness.

This tendency to use elocutionary standards in theatrical criticism becomes even more understandable when we examine the extent of the actor's and critic's practical acquaintance with these elocutionary precepts. One actor by the name of John B. Rice became known among his fellow actors as "Walker Elocution Rice," so closely did he follow the prescriptions of Walker's elocutionary precepts.<sup>49</sup> When the actor had instruction outside the theatre, he was apt to be taught by an elocutionist, as Murdoch and Forrest were by White. In addition, those who

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<sup>49</sup>Murdoch, The Stage, p. 49.



received all their training as apprentices on the stage itself were influenced by a style of acting which had formed the basis for some of the earliest elocutionary precepts.

The editors of the periodicals, who were also theatrical critics, had an even more thorough grounding in the principles taught by the elocutionists. The editor of the New England Galaxy, for example, was certainly familiar with elocution, since he was able to criticize a lecture on "elocution and chironomia" and assert that the speaker's object must have been to try to disprove Walker's system of elocution, a feat which was quite beyond his powers. This editor, Joseph T. Buckingham, points out that Mr. Turner, the lecturer, gave "proofs irresistible" of his lack of understanding of the simple elements on which Walker's system was founded. With reference to a program of readings following the lecture, the critic considered Mr. Turner "equally unfortunate" in this category, and argued that

His pronunciation [delivery] of sentences proved he did not know the difference between inflection and emphasis; and his elision of syllables in blank verse were enough to satisfy the dullest ear that he was entirely ignorant of the harmony in poetical feet, and the common principles of versification.<sup>50</sup>

On still another occasion we find a critic familiar enough with elocutionary theory to indulge in an extensive criticism of both Rush's Philosophy of the Human Voice and Porter's Analysis of the Principles of Rhetorical Delivery. The critic's ability to compare and contrast the work of these two men with that of Austin, Sheridan, and Steele suggests a rather extensive knowledge of the elocutionists and their

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<sup>50</sup>New England Galaxy, November 10, 1820, p. 18.

works.<sup>51</sup> Montrose J. Moses goes so far as to imply that the critic of the period was so much under the influence of oratorical style that he wrote his theatrical reviews with an oratorical flavor. Referring to an example from the period, he says

There is the tang of oratorical rhythm about all this, dominant over the critical understanding. The critic of the theatre becomes correct rather than illuminating, except in so far as he displays his own taste and shows what he is looking for.<sup>52</sup>

Whether critically illuminating or not in Moses's terms, the critic is reflecting the taste of his age and suggesting the pervasive influences which led audiences to base their judgments of the actor's performance on principles of oratorical delivery.

The statement that the acting of the period is likely to be viewed in the orator's terms rests primarily, however, on the evidence of the reviews themselves. That a common standard for judging these two arts did exist in the period is seen in numerous references to the stage as a "school of elocution and oratory." In July 1817, a critic, writing for the American Monthly Magazine, offered an apologia for the severity of his theatrical criticisms during the preceding season. He stated that his justification for such a course was to "excite a proper ambition among the performers." He continued:

It is not our province to lecture upon elocution,--on the contrary, we would gladly receive lessons on the art from the stage. But the art must be learnt before it can be taught. . . . While we do attend

<sup>51</sup>North American Review, July, 1829, pp. 38-40.

<sup>52</sup>Moses, Forrest, p. 28.

the Theatre we will insist at least that the language be spoken correctly, and those who persist in violations of orthoepy that we have pointed out, shall themselves be properly designated.<sup>53</sup>

"Cato," of the Mirror, goes even further and records an account (probably fictitious) of a conversation between "Mr. Frost" and "Mr. Liberal" concerning the "morality or immorality" of the stage. Mr. Frost takes the position that the stage is the habitation of the devil, while Mr. Liberal argues that "the stage inspired our youth with a love for oratory, and taught them the art of suiting the word to the action; the action to the passion; the passion to the character; and the character to the design of nature's great author."<sup>54</sup> The critic goes on to say that Mr. Liberal admitted that not all actors have "the ability, education, character, manner" befitting their profession, but he adds that "we have many bright exceptions whose grace, accomplishments, learning, talents, and worth, have made them models of oratory; and have established the stage the best school for the public speaker." Mr. Liberal believed, moreover, that if "men of science would favour the public with a periodical critique of the stage, the American theatre might become a great promoter of the fine arts, ethics, and oratory. . . ."<sup>55</sup>

Such an attitude toward the theatre persisted throughout the period under review in this study. In 1831, the Mirror's critic bemoaned the fact that "a world of acclamation is wasted on the worst parts" of an actor's performance. "As long as the lovers of drama,"

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<sup>53</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 211.

<sup>54</sup>New York Mirror, January 21, 1826, p. 206.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

he warns, "suffer themselves to be so deceived, the stage will continue to be a bad school of elocution, and it will be censure against a public speaker to say that his manner is 'theatrical.'"<sup>56</sup> Five years later the same magazine argued that the drama should rank above all the "classick arts," as it did in the day of ancient Greece when "it was considered the arbiter of contested idiom or pronunciation, the school of genius, the scourge of vice, the guardian of moral truth--the instructive as well as amusing relaxation."<sup>57</sup> Such statements imply that "theatrical oratory" was considered a mark of excellence. They also seem to indicate that the critic is concerned that the actor remain the model (as the elocutionist often suggested he should be) for the orator to follow, and set it as his task to see that he remained a "pure and undefiled" one.

The period from 1815 to 1840 appears to be one in which a single set of standards governing the pronunciation, vocal management, bodily expression, emotional portrayal, and conformation to the requirements of nature developed in the criticism of actors and orators. That such a situation should exist is not surprising in view of the tradition which had related the arts of acting and oratory for centuries, and in view of the fact that an "oratorical" or declamatory style of acting was preserved in America until about 1840. Moreover, such factors as the interest in correct language usage, the tendency to equate leadership ability with speaking ability, and the supply of teachers who had been

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1831, p. 115.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., August 27, 1836, p. 70.

actors or who held up the actor as a good model, served as an impetus in the establishment of a single set of criteria for the delivery of both actor and orator. In addition, the major aspects of the oral product which the elocutionist analyzed were such as to lend themselves to an adequate description of the kind of acting prevalent in this age. Finally, the critic's and actor's familiarity with elocutionary precepts, and the critic's desire to maintain the stage as the model for correctness in speech, support the assumption that by analyzing theatrical criticism in terms of elocutionary principles we may be able to characterize more exactly the styles of acting current during the period.

## CHAPTER II

### STANDARDS OF PRONUNCIATION REQUIRED OF THE ACTOR ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

"If Noah Webster had not been born, we should have had  
to invent him."  
--Thomas Pyles

The problem inherent in a study of acting styles and techniques is that of isolating the standards of excellence which were applied to the actor's product in a given period. In the case of the early nineteenth century, when the American theatrical critic thought it his duty to purge the stage of its impurities, improprieties, and imperfections,<sup>1</sup> one such standard involved the matter of the actor's pronunciation. In his campaign to eliminate the grounds for prejudice against the stage, one critic declared:

We have observed many inaccuracies, particularly in pronunciation, of which we have here, taken no note. We have not wished to appear hypercritical in the outset, but we shall be more strict, hereafter, in marking transgressions, especially against orthoepy.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of the general desire of the age to "fix" and "refine" the language, American critics of the theatre became particularly conscious of the variations in pronunciation among actors. As "watchdogs of

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<sup>1</sup>American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review [ed. H. Biglow], May, 1817, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. June, 1817, p. 138.



society," critics objected to any actor's pronunciation which did not meet what they considered the standards of correct pronunciation. One reason given for demanding that the actor conform to such a standard was that many "fashionable people adopt the pronunciation of the stage."<sup>3</sup> This statement supports Harder's conjecture that the pronunciation of actors influenced that of the audience.<sup>4</sup>

What, then, were the standards of pronunciation which the actor was expected to achieve? In answering this question, we must keep in mind, first of all, that in this period the term "pronunciation" had a dual meaning. It could refer to the whole subject of the speaker's delivery, as in the title of John Mason's work, An Essay on Elocution, or Pronunciation,<sup>5</sup> or it could be used in its present-day sense of referring to the sounds and accents with which individual words are uttered.<sup>6</sup> It is with "orthoepy" as it relates to the sounds and accents of individual words that this chapter is concerned.

Fittingly enough, one standard of pronunciation widely followed during the period was that put forth by the actor-elocutionist Thomas Sheridan, in his Complete Dictionary of the English Language. Sheridan's standard of pronunciation was that of the Queen Anne period--a period in which, he believed, the pronunciation of the English

<sup>3</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], June, 1818, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup>Jayne Crane Harder, "The Influence of the Teaching of Elocution on Modern English Pronunciation" (doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, 1956), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>John Mason, An Essay on Elocution, or Pronunciation (London, 1748).

<sup>6</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, pp. 40-41.

language reached perfection,<sup>7</sup> whatever he meant by that. It might be noted at this point that his enthusiasm for these standards was not unique; indeed, it was echoed by Noah Webster.<sup>8</sup>

Sheridan maintained that, although audiences would expect a good speaker to avoid stammering, lisping, mumbling, the use of too high or too low a pitch, and discordant tones and cadences, they would also judge him by his pronunciation which, he said, is "caught" from one's associates and is, therefore, an indication of the company the speaker keeps.<sup>9</sup> To Sheridan, the process of becoming a good speaker consisted of replacing a bad habit with a good one.<sup>10</sup> In practice, this meant that a speaker who had a defect in his pronunciation needed, first, to become aware of that defect, and establish its precise nature. Then, it was essential to have a method for correcting the fault and to apply it.<sup>11</sup> Insofar as the actor of the period is concerned, it was the theatrical critic who took it upon himself to point out the "defect" in the actor's pronunciation and suggest a remedy for it, one often based on the Sheridan standard of correctness.

John Walker, author of A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary, Elements of Elocution, and other works, was perhaps even more influential

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<sup>7</sup>Thomas Sheridan, A Complete Dictionary of the English Language (2nd ed.; London, 1789), Preface.

<sup>8</sup>Noah Webster, Dissertations on the English Language (Boston, 1789), p. 30.

<sup>9</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, p. 51.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

in setting standards of pronunciation to which the actor was expected to conform.<sup>12</sup> In some quarters, at least, Walker's views on the subject were held in high regard. Literary critics found Walker's recommendations worthy of endorsement. For example, the critic on the American Quarterly Review credited Walker with having a superior knowledge of correct pronunciation since he was conversant with the best of London's society.<sup>13</sup>

It is entirely possible, however, that Walker's social environment was not the exclusive source of his views on pronunciation. Like Sheridan, Walker had been an actor and some of his recommendations may well have been rooted in stage practice. The critic of the American Quarterly thought so, at any rate, since he noted that some persons had misunderstood Walker who "meant to give the precise, exact pronunciation of public speakers in Parliament, in the Pulpit, and on the Stage, but not the more careless and slovenly utterance of familiar conversation."<sup>14</sup>

Walker not only made an effort to standarize pronunciation, but developed a system of notation to guide the speaker to correct pronunciation.<sup>15</sup> His method was to divide words into syllables, indicate the accented syllable, and mark the sounds of the vowels.<sup>16</sup> In carrying

<sup>12</sup>John Walker, A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary (Edinburg, 1830); Elements of Elocution (Boston, 1810).

<sup>13</sup>American Quarterly Review, September, 1818, pp. 202-203.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>15</sup>Haberman, in History of Speech Education, p. 111.

<sup>16</sup>Walker, Critical Pronouncing Dictionary, p. 9.

out his purpose, Walker began by "settling the true pronunciations of those letters, syllables, and words, which are the most liable to be mistaken by the generality of readers and speakers."<sup>17</sup>

Because of the extent to which the early nineteenth century theatrical criticism reflects Walker's standards, it is of distinct value to examine the general areas and conditions included in his writings on the subject. In his estimation, a good speaker or reader would not be guilty of "too slightly sounding the accented vowels," but would tend to prolong the three sounds of a a [e], [a], [ɔ], and of o [O]; nor would he permit unaccented vowels to have too slight an accent, as in the case of regular pronounced as ['regə'lə], event as "uvvent" [ə'vent], or sensible as "sensubble" ['sensəbəl]. Such words he maintained, must preserve the u and i from "indistinctness and obscurity," and be pronounced ['regjələ], [i'vent], and ['sensibəl].<sup>18</sup> Walker also recommended the "liquid sound of k, c, or g hard" before the vowels a or i, so that kind is pronounced "as if written ke-ind."<sup>19</sup> Speakers who chose to follow Walker were also advised to employ the "liquid sounds" of t, d, s, and soft c [ʃ] in the endings -tion, -sion, -cion, while d was to become [dʒ] in such words as verdure, and educate. In odious, Indian, and similar words, the i was to have an "e sound," making them [ˈɒdʒiəs] and [ˈɪndʒiən].<sup>20</sup> Walker, in his attempt to

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<sup>17</sup>Walker, Rhetorical Grammar, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-25.

preserve the elegance and beauty of the language, also insisted on the release of final plosives and the pronouncing of s distinctly after st.<sup>21</sup>

When the theatrical critic's treatment of the actor's pronunciation is examined with reference to these rules, it becomes apparent that Walker's influence was indeed widespread. The critic frequently turned to the Walker recommendations in order to bolster his indictment against an actor who was guilty of what he considered a mispronunciation.

One critic, paraphrasing a Walker principle, reminded the actors that

"when u is under the accent, the d or t never coalesces with it; or we should hear tshutor, enjure, and jupe for tutor, endure, and dupe."<sup>22</sup>

In like manner, a Boston correspondent considered such errors in pronunciation as juty for duty, juraction for duration, and machure for mature as "vicious" as did Walker.<sup>23</sup> The editor of the Boston Galaxy further revealed the critic's reliance on Walker's Dictionary when answering an article in the Centinel signed "A. B." In this controversy involving the word yeast, the editor cited as his authority Walker's Dictionary, "the only one we have at hand," and quoted Walker's note on this word:

Dr. Johnson has very properly spelled this word yeast, . . . and not yeast, as we sometimes see it; . . . Mr. Sheridan . . . [writes] it as Dr. Johnson has done, and pronounces it as I have done; and I think not only more agreeable to analogy, which forbids us to pronounce e long, when followed by st in the same syllable, (see Lest,) but, if I mistake not, more consonant to polite usage. The vulgar do not only pronounce the diphthong long, but sink the y, and reduce the word to east.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>22</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], June, 1817, p. 138.

<sup>23</sup>New England Galaxy, October 26, 1821, p. 218.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., October 24, 1817, n.p.

There are many other examples of Walker's strictures being echoed by the critics. It is interesting to observe the several applications of Walker's recommendation that pronouns in an unstressed position in the sentence be pronounced with an "e sound" for the y, except in the case of thy, a form no longer current in contemporary speech, should always have its full value and rhyme with high.<sup>25</sup> "Crito" of the New York Commercial Advertiser praised Cooper for restoring "the vowel y to its proper sound in defiance of theatric affectation of softening it invariably to e, thereby injuring essentially the pronunciation and emasculating the language."<sup>26</sup> Payne, in his Thespian Mirror, likewise commended Fennell for avoiding "the ridiculous, miserable affectation, of changing the sound of y into that of e in thy, my and some few others. . . ."<sup>27</sup> The critic of the American Monthly found a violation of Walker's rule for pronouncing a pronoun in a stressed position in the speech of Carpenter, whom he took to task for "slurring my, where it should have been emphatic, in which case it should rhyme with eye."<sup>28</sup> One critic, duplicating Walker's pronouncement regarding the fault of substituting y for v, intimated that the wrath of the god could not be as soft as one actor made him out to be when he proclaimed "the wengeful will of angry Jove."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Walker, Rhetorical Grammar, pp. 37-39; 42-45.

<sup>26</sup>Quoted in Odell, Annals, II, 75.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>28</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 208.

<sup>29</sup>New York Mirror, October 4, 1823, p. 100.



While critics did not always cite Walker as his authority, there are instances in which it is obvious that they were referring to this lexicographer. Cooper, for instance, was indicted for accenting the word orison on the second syllable in the "very passage too which is quoted by lexicographers to prove that the accent should be on the first syllable--Nymph, in thy orisons/Be all my sins remembered."<sup>30</sup> The lexicographer referred to in this case could be no other than Walker whose note on this word employs the same quotation and reads in part: "Dr. Johnson tells us this word is variously accented; that Shakespeare has the accent both on the first and second syllables. . . ."<sup>31</sup> The critic is probably correct in assuming that, in this example, Walker meant the word to be stressed on the first syllable, since he follows it with another quotation from Shakespeare which he employs to show the accent on the second syllable.

While the preceding instances indicate a direct application of, and insistence on, Walker's standards, there are other cases in which the critic reflects the influence of Walker. It would appear, for example, that the critic on the American Monthly, who kept a list of the actor's "improprieties" in pronunciation and, when space permitted, published these "defects" along with their "remedies," probably had a copy of Walker's Dictionary or his Rhetorical Grammar as his reference. On one occasion, the list of faults contained such items as the following, to use the critic's method of indicating pronunciation: "bean

<sup>30</sup>New England Galaxy, November 24, 1820, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup>See Walker, Critical Pronouncing Dictionary, s.v. Orison.

rather than bin for been, po-sess rather than pozzess for possess, rarther and arfter for rather and after, parents for pa-rents, and lep for leap.<sup>32</sup> The critic also objected to Mr. Hilson's "improper" way of pronouncing drove and bosom, and to the "inaccuracy" of Miss Johnson's pronunciation of oblige, any, and many. Other actors, he observed, were guilty of accenting indecorous on the antepenult, or clipping pecuniary to pecunary, and calling any, "anny," instead of enny.<sup>33</sup> The following month this critic's list of "improprieties" held such items as the "short i" of Mr. Pritchard, instead of the "long i" in ensign; the ware instead of wer for were; the "short i" in gripe [a handshake], which must always have the "i long"; and the "short i" in wind, which requires the "long i" in poetry. He also objected to Mr. Carpenter's giving the o in combat the sound of the o in not, "whereas it should be pronounced like the o in brothers."<sup>34</sup> The other violations of orthoepy included in this account were equally in accord with the standards of Walker. Items such as the critic's concern over Mr. Simpson's use of jubious for dubious, or the errors of Mr. Pritchard in pronouncing "has, rather, lance, &c [sic] with the a heard in father, and not . . . with the a heard in hat . . .," bear a marked resemblance to Walker's recommendations. In this latter instance, the critic noted

<sup>32</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], June, 1817, p. 138. It is interesting to note that the respellings rarther and arfter represent ['raʃə] and ['aftə] and that the critic is probably following Walker who decried the use of [a] for [æ] in these words; see his Critical Pronouncing Dictionary, s.v. Rather, After.

<sup>33</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], June, 1817, p. 138.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., July, 1817, p. 208.

that "this, though not in the same degree, is the fault of every performer on these boards."<sup>35</sup> So far as this "broad a" is concerned, it must be remembered that the actors being criticized were almost all of British origin, and although Walker, Sheridan and others had considered the change of [æ] to [a] in words such as lance, rather, staff, bath, and similar ones "vulgar," it had prevailed in England.<sup>36</sup>

A further clue to the extent which theatrical concern over pronunciation focused on areas or matters treated by Walker is provided by the critic who took Mr. Thorne to task for using the ending [-ɪŋ] instead of [-ɪʃ], an articulatory "fault" which Walker also treated in his Rhetorical Grammar. While Thorne was a member of the company appearing at the Bowery Theatre, the critic called attention to the tendency of actors of both the New York theatres to "suffer divers of their organs to lie idle even in the height of declamation. We hear bein, instead of being--given instead of giving--shillin, comin. . ."<sup>37</sup> We might notice in relation to this point that, while Walker allowed the -ing ending to rhyme with in in verbs ending with -ing, as bring, ring, he would not permit it in such words as the critic cited.

Not only is there evidence that Walker's rules for acceptable pronunciation were favored in theatrical quarters, there is also reason

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. It should be noted that, if Mr. Pritchard did actually use the pronunciation [haz] for has, he was affecting it for reasons of his own and not because he followed any normal speech pattern of either America or England.

<sup>36</sup>America, on the other hand, except for the coastal areas of New England and the South, had retained the older eighteenth-century [æ] in these words. On this point, see Pyles, Words and Ways, pp. 65-66.

<sup>37</sup>New York Mirror, October 8, 1831, p. 111.

to suspect that they were sometimes applied over-zealously. The actor in some cases probably followed the prescriptions of Walker too closely, and developed patterns of pronunciation that became faulty by virtue of carrying the elocutionist's precepts to ridiculous extremes. As a case in point, we might observe the treatment of the r for which Walker had allowed two pronunciations, one of which was a "rough r" formed by "jarring the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth, near the fore-teeth," and which was used at the beginning of words.<sup>38</sup> This may well have been carried to excess on occasions since we find critical reference to "an unpleasant habit of dwelling on the letter r . . . " so that "right becomes erright, strange ster-range. . . ." <sup>39</sup> Additional attention is focused on this possibility by the fact that Murdoch, when dealing with what he called the "vibrant r," recognized the fact that some actors continued the vibration too long or failed to coalesce it with other sounds, producing such pronunciations as "e-r-r and r-oll."<sup>40</sup>

An examination of the standards of excellence against which the actor's habits of pronunciation were measured would seem to indicate that they were essentially those prescribed by Sheridan and Walker. Indeed, these orthospists served as the major influences in pronunciation until the American dictionaries of Worcester and Webster became popular, and even these latter works reflected the influence of the two elocutionist-lexicographers.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Walker, Rhetorical Grammar, pp. 28-30.

<sup>39</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], June, 1817, p. 141.

<sup>40</sup>Murdoch, Analytic Elocution, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup>Harder, "Influence of the Teaching of Elocution," p. 83.

The preceding parallels between theatrical criticism and the rules prescribed in Walker's writings make it clear that, of these influences, Walker's was the more dominant. The elocutionists who followed in the wake of these two figures had few specific recommendations of their own to make concerning pronunciation. Nevertheless, by endorsing the standards prescribed by the dictionaries, they did add to an awareness of the importance of pronunciation, thus making it a critical measure of an actor's skill. For example, although William Enfield, whose work was popular in the United States, contented himself with general observations on "propriety and elegance" in pronunciation, the few specific recommendations he did make served to reinforce those of Walker. We find in them suggestions such as: "pronounce h where it ought to be used; do not insert it where it ought not to be; and do not confound w and v."<sup>42</sup> Lindley Murray, whose English Reader became a popular American text, further exemplifies this tendency. Murray had only a few remarks to make on the necessity for "propriety of pronunciation," but, beyond that, he endorsed the dictionaries of Sheridan and Walker as a means of "ascertaining the true and best pronunciation."<sup>43</sup> In general, we may agree with Harder that the role of the American elocutionist of this period in regard to pronunciation was to give endorsement to the authoritarian claim by the lexicographer of his right to legislate in matters pertaining to the question of acceptable pronunciation.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>William Enfield, The Speaker (Philadelphia, 1817), p. 9.

<sup>43</sup>Lindley Murray, The English Reader (Albany, 1824), pp. 7-8.

<sup>44</sup>Harder, "The Influence of the Teaching of Elocution," p. 85.



While the American elocutionist may have added little that was new to the subject of pronunciation, he did have his part to play in helping to make the period conscious--perhaps even self-conscious--of the way in which it pronounced many words. Granted, few of the American elocutionists included orthoepy in their elocutionary systems, they nevertheless can be credited with having influenced the actor's or public speaker's delivery, as far as pronunciation is concerned. Although their specific recommendations on the subject may have served only to strengthen the dictionary-maker's influence,<sup>45</sup> they did provide exercises by which the pronunciation-conscious reader or speaker might improve his articulation of certain sounds, either alone or in combination with other sounds. Just as Sheridan and Walker had sought in their dictionaries to "fix" the standard of pronunciation which everyone should adopt, the American elocutionists who followed them desired, through the materials and methods they provided, to show "everyone how to use the standard language most effectively."<sup>46</sup>

It follows, then, that in a consideration of the role which pronunciation played in early nineteenth-century acting technique, it is necessary to admit a second factor: the existence of a body of organized material designed to assist the speaker in achieving the standards set by the lexicographers. The critic insisting on the principle of a "fixed" pronunciation could stand firm in the knowledge that he was

<sup>45</sup>Harder, "The Influence of the Teaching of Elocution," pp. 84-85.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 85.



supported by elocutionary precepts of pronunciation generally accepted as reliable guides.<sup>47</sup> The pioneer work of the American elocutionist, Ebenezer Porter, whose Rhetorical Reader and Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery were probably the most widely-used textbooks during the early years of the century,<sup>48</sup> exemplify the sort of material on pronunciation which was influential in the period. Porter's Rhetorical Delivery not only provided a good synthesis of the major principles of the English elocutionists on the subject of pronunciation, primarily those of Sheridan and Walker, but also was concerned with the difficulty of pronouncing consonant sounds, especially consecutive ones of similar sound, the influence of accent on vowel sounds, and the tendency of speakers to slide over unaccented vowel sounds.<sup>49</sup> James Rush, another influential American elocutionist, gave a great deal of attention to an analysis of the sounds of the language. His Philosophy of the Human Voice represents an attempt to make elocution a scientific study, one which led him to analyze the simplest elements of language, the vowel and consonant sounds. In time, his followers were able to simplify his highly complex findings and to make his principles "teachable," thus putting them within reach of public speakers, readers, and actors. The first of these teachers to employ the Rush system of elocution was

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>48</sup>Ebenezer Porter, Analysis of the Principles of Rhetorical Delivery (Andover, 1827); The Rhetorical Reader (15th ed.; Andover, 1835). Concerning the popularity of these books, see Robb, in History of Speech Education, p. 179.

<sup>49</sup>Porter, Rhetorical Delivery, pp. 25-32.

Jonathan Barber in his Grammar of Elocution.<sup>50</sup> While Barber relied on the Rush terminology, he developed his own methods, and it is said he required his students to practice individual vowel and consonant sounds for long periods.<sup>51</sup> It was thus that articulation and enunciation, elements vital to the process of satisfying standards of pronunciation, came to have such prominence in the American elocutionary works.<sup>52</sup>

The American elocutionist, therefore, while he may not have had original prescriptions of his own to make for standardizing the pronunciation, did give impetus to the authoritarian viewpoint which sought to "fix" the standard of pronunciation for everyone to follow. The body of nineteenth-century theatrical criticism would indicate that the theatrical critic followed the lead of these elocutionists and likewise endorsed the lexicographer's claim to supremacy as an arbiter in matters of pronunciation. The writers recommended to the actor that he have recourse to a dictionary to correct his faults. One actress, for instance, who was playing in Cinderella and invariably omitting the s from the plural of steed, was advised to use her wand to conjure up a dictionary occasionally.<sup>53</sup> Another critic grew tired of calling the actors' attention to their errors in pronunciation since they, seemingly, did not profit by his advice. He went on to remark that, so far as correct pronunciation was concerned, there was an "acknowledged standard" to which all

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<sup>50</sup>Barber, Grammar of Elocution; on this point, see Robb, in History of Speech Education, pp. 184-185.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>52</sup>Harder, "The Influence of the Teaching of Elocution," p. 77.

<sup>53</sup>New York Mirror, August 27, 1831, p. 63.

could refer, and added there was no "calculating what improvement, in other respects, might result from a greater familiarity with their dictionaries."<sup>54</sup> A Polyanthos critic declared that actors who had "never committed the sin of looking into a dictionary" could not be expected to give vowels and diphthongs their proper sound.<sup>55</sup> Such comments as these, rather frequent in the theatrical criticisms of the period, demonstrate the degree to which the critic followed the elocutionist in looking to the dictionaries for authority in pronunciation.

Thus far we have noted the standards of pronunciation prevailing between 1815 and 1840, the critic's tendency to rely on dictionary prescriptions when evaluating an actor's performance, and the extent to which the existing systems of elocution provided exercises and methods for improving pronunciation. It becomes necessary, then, to examine the theatrical importance of this aspect of vocal delivery, and the degree of emphasis assigned to it by those making judgments on the performers of the day. The elocutionist, both English and American, wielded great influence in making the question of acceptable pronunciation a major one in the period under review. The theatrical critic also gave a prominent place to this problem in his criticism of the actor's performance. The degree of importance which the critic attached to this phase of the performance may be seen, first of all, in the fact that, not only did he direct his censure to the ordinary member of the stock company, but doled out his strictures to the major stars as well. The American, for

<sup>54</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 208.

<sup>55</sup>Polyanthos, December, 1812, pp. 162-163.

instance, observed that "errors of emphasis and pronunciation were common" in the speech of the elder Booth.<sup>56</sup> The Boston critic was far more specific and suggested that Booth's "pronunciation of the words first, worst, curse, &c [sic] would not be considered classical or polite in an audience of scholars. He drops the 'liquid r' and pronounces them fust, wust, cuss."<sup>57</sup> Vigilance regarding matters of pronunciation was not relaxed, even in the case of an actor as firmly established as Cooper. He, too, came in for criticism, when, in violation of Walker's rule, "He made h silent when it should have been aspirated."<sup>58</sup>

The importance which the critic gave to pronunciation is further seen in his insistence that his recommendations be followed. When they were not, he repeated them. A case in point is that of the critic who, in reviewing Cinderella a month after his first report of it, saw fit to berate Mrs. Barnes for continuing to omit the s from the plural of steed, in spite of his earlier admonition.<sup>59</sup> Another critic, who had objected to an actor's sounding the last syllable of portentous as if it were portentious, could not look upon the error as "venial" when the actor persisted in this mispronunciation.<sup>60</sup> The Galaxy, in 1820, printed a letter from "A Subscriber" who complained of the discontinuance

<sup>56</sup>American, October 16, 1821, quoted in Odell, Annals, III, 12.

<sup>57</sup>New England Galaxy, May 17, 1822, n.p.

<sup>58</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 211.

<sup>59</sup>New York Mirror, September 10, 1831, p. 78.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

of the theatrical criticism in the past few issues. The editor replied that theatrical criticism had become "unprofitable" to actor and public alike, presumably because the editor's recommendations for the actor's improvement, like those of the New York critic, had gone unheeded. Instead, the critic advised theatre managers to "employ a schoolmaster to teach the rudiments of reading, and particularly the English pronunciation of the alphabet" to their actors.<sup>61</sup>

Theatrical critics of the period generally agreed that the stage ought to be a model for correct pronunciation. One critic, for instance, bemoaned the fact that the stage could no longer be looked to for "the standard of English pronunciation," because the actors had grown so lax in this regard.<sup>62</sup> Another critic thought, however, that the stage should be preserved as "an authority on questions of orthoepey," and advised the actors to avoid, at all costs, such errors as rhyming "Eurydice" with mice, and making "Terpsichore" a three-syllable word.<sup>63</sup> Further testimony as to the importance which the critic placed on the necessity of maintaining the stage as a correct influence on pronunciation is to be seen in the American Monthly critic's admonition that the actors should have "correct apprehensions of the dignity of their profession," in making the stage "a school of rhetoric, at least it relates to all its exteriors," in order that "it should exhibit the refinement of polished manners, and should be a model of pronunciation."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup>New England Galaxy, February 4, 1820, p. 65.

<sup>62</sup>Polyanthos, December, 1812, pp. 162-163.

<sup>63</sup>New York Mirror, August 27, 1831, p. 63.

<sup>64</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], August, 1817, pp. 301-302.

In general, we might say that the elocutionist was interested in the subject of pronunciation and laid down certain rules and recommendations which good speakers, readers, and actors were to follow. The theatrical critic appears to have adopted these recommendations and rated the actor in accordance with them. The early orthoepists, Sheridan and Walker, set the fashion with their prescriptions based, to some extent, on stage practice. Whether the theatrical critic had studied the elocutionist's texts or not, the fact remains that he did have recourse to their authority, and to the authorities they recommended, for the "correct pronunciations" by which he judged the actor's speech. The elocutionist of the period underscored the authority of the lexicographer in prescribing acceptable pronunciations, and provided specific instruction regarding methods of improving pronunciation and meeting these standards. The theatrical critic, consciously or not, followed in his path, insisting that it was important for the actor to pronounce words "correctly," demanding the stage provide good models for pronunciation, and establishing a set of rigid standards for the actor's pronunciation, if he were to be rated as an actor par excellence.



### CHAPTER III

#### CRITICISM OF THE AMERICAN ACTOR'S VOCAL TECHNIQUE

"The blind might have seen him in his voice. . . ."

--Aaron Hill

Of all the factors which the elocutionist observed and recorded in his analyses of the actor's and orator's delivery, the one that impressed him most and which formed the major emphasis in his teaching, was that of voice. The theatrical critic was equally influenced by the importance of the vocal element in the actor's performance; consequently he, too, devoted much attention to the actor's vocal technique. That emphasis may have been fortunate in view of the object of this study, for it is perhaps on his vocal management that the actor's style, in the final analysis, must rest. We can probably say that, because he maintained this elocutionary stress on the vocal element in his criticism, the theatrical critic of the first part of the nineteenth century would have agreed with James E. Murdoch that "excellence in dramatic art was mainly attributable to the actor's mastery over his voice. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The term "elocution" was at times used by the elocutionist and critic to designate the vocal element alone, as it was by John Mason, who defined elocution as the "right management of the voice in reading

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<sup>1</sup>Murdoch, The Stage, p. 80.

and speaking."<sup>2</sup> The importance attached to this factor is reflected by Sheridan who believed the power of the living voice to be greater than that of the written word.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Austin prefaced his remarks on voice with the words, "all that language and tones can effect to influence the understanding and to win the affections depends upon the power of the voice addressed to the ear."<sup>4</sup> The critics writing for the periodicals of the time gave considerable attention to this factor, as is attested by a statement from the North American Review which pointed out that "the voice is the organ of the soul," and "articulate speech the grand instrument of the orator."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this writer was of the opinion that training in voice, rather than gesture, should occupy the central position in courses of rhetorical instruction.

Critics of the period's theatrical product demonstrate a similar tendency to assign a major degree of importance to vocal management. Indeed, their writings indicate it became a prime factor in establishing the actor's excellence. For instance, while Wallack's portrayal of Rolla, Octavian, and Hamlet during his 1818 Boston engagement was generally given the stamp of approval, the critic had a reservation to make in regard to this actor's use of his voice. "His greatest fault," the critic observed, "is a want of rhetorical accuracy

<sup>2</sup>Mason, An Essay on Elocution, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup>Austin, Chironomia, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>North American Review, July, 1829, p. 40.

and refinement in elocution--a fault which . . . cannot be counter-balanced by the finest acting in the world."<sup>6</sup> The critic is here obviously equating elocution with the spoken aspect of the actor's performance, and "acting" with its physical aspects. He asserts that the actor must appeal to the "ear" and the understanding of the audience, as well as to the "eye."<sup>7</sup> Such a statement might well have been paraphrased from Sheridan who distinguished between the language of tones addressed to the ear, and the language of gesture addressed to the eye.<sup>8</sup> The critic might also have been echoing Porter's statement that the "tender emotions" were excited more strongly by tones of voice addressed to the "ear" than by physical signs addressed to the "eye."<sup>9</sup> A Philadelphia critic reflected a similar idea in his comment that Kean's consciousness of his vocal insufficiency led him to compensate with violent physical efforts and caused him to play inordinately "to the eye."<sup>10</sup> For both elocutionist and theatrical critic, then, it would appear the manner in which the performer used his voice was of prime importance. The matter was perhaps best summed up by one critic who denounced those who found physical strength to be Forrest's only merit. Such a notion, he thought, was preposterous, for "an actor could no more play a

<sup>6</sup>New England Galaxy, December 11, 1818, n.p.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, p. 144.

<sup>9</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup>From a series of reviews on Edmund Kean in the Philadelphia National Gazette, February 6, 7, 8, 1821, reprinted in Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 302.

spirrit-stirring [sic] part without a power of voice and a strength of nerve than a sculptor could make an Apollo or a Venus from the rough marble without a chisel."<sup>11</sup>

When theatrical criticisms of acting in the period from 1815 to 1840 are analyzed, certain characteristics of voice are found to be highly prized, and certain attributes of vocal expression are demanded of the performer if he is to receive the critic's commendation. First of all, the critic insisted that the actor possess a voice which would enable him to be heard throughout an auditorium, and that he use his voice so as to be understood easily. Such a requirement would appear to be so obvious that it would hardly need to be mentioned, yet both critic and elocutionist set this standard as the first to be met. One critic remarked that "Mr. Duff would be more distinctly heard if he would accustom himself to speaking a little more in the higher tones of his voice," since "many of his periods are delivered in so low a tone as to be scarcely audible."<sup>12</sup> The student of acting technique may be left in some doubt as to whether this critic is recommending that the actor raise his pitch or increase his volume. Porter cleared the point up in his statement that "it is a common thing for speakers to confound high with loud, and low with soft. Hence we often hear it remarked of one that he speaks in a low voice, when the meaning is, a feeble one. . . ."<sup>13</sup> With such a point of reference, we may safely conclude that Duff needed greater volume in his speaking, not a higher pitch.

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<sup>11</sup>American Monthly Magazine, July 1, 1834, p. 360.

<sup>12</sup>New England Galaxy, February 27, 1818, n.p.

<sup>13</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 106.

Other examples from the theatrical criticism of the period tend to support the conclusion that the elocutionist's requirements for distinctness and audibility were part of the critic's yardstick for measuring an actor's ability. [The American Monthly critic, for example, had assured Mrs. Barnes that "to be well heard, the quantity of sound is much less important than distinctness of articulation.

. . ."<sup>14</sup> "Mossop," a Bostonian correspondent of the Galaxy, complained he could not always hear and understand Kean."<sup>15</sup> Another correspondent suggested that Kilner seemed "to disdain all avenues to the senses, save the auricular nerves."<sup>16</sup> In New York, the Mirror critic, who had been chiding an actor for "muttering," exclaimed in one review, "Mr. Simpson permitted the audience to hear what he had to say in the character of Charles Franklin--Wonderful!--Wonderful!--Wonderful!!!"<sup>17</sup>

In addition to their insistence that the performer make himself heard and understood, the elocutionist and critic added the further requirement that he do so with "grace" and "ease." Sheridan, for instance, noted a common fault of speakers was that of straining their voices to make themselves heard,<sup>18</sup> a practice encouraged, perhaps, by the poor acoustics of the available auditoriums. Likewise, the eight rules to which William Enfield reduced the art of elocution were designed to help

<sup>14</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 205.

<sup>15</sup>New England Galaxy, February 23, 1821, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., November 18, 1821, p. 230.

<sup>17</sup>New York Mirror, December 11, 1824, p. 155.

<sup>18</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, pp. 116-121.

the speaker or reader to acquire a "just and graceful elocution."<sup>19</sup> Walker's writings on the subject, which became the fashion in American elocution, typify this point of emphasis. He not only subjected the element of voice to minute analysis,<sup>20</sup> but also defined the art of reading as "that system of rules, which teaches use to pronounce [speak] with justness, energy, variety, and ease."<sup>21</sup>

Nineteenth-century American theatrical criticism represents an application of the elocutionist's teachings on the subject of "grace" and "ease" in voice production. One critic, who had assured Mrs. Barnes that her voice was "universally offensive," went on to point out that "she must have acquired this disagreeable voice under an impression that in her natural tones she could not be sufficiently energetic and audible."<sup>22</sup> The Philadelphia critic, who signed his reviews with the name "Betterton," and whose criticism Hillebrand cited as the best description of Kean's acting method to be found anywhere, noted that "the greatest physical blemish to be signalized in this tragedian, is the imperfection of his voice. This is universally admitted to be harsh and broken; while sweetness is, by some, ascribed to its lower tones."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Enfield, The Speaker, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>Warren Guthrie, "The Elocution Movement in England," Speech Monographs [SM], XVIII (March, 1951), 27.

<sup>21</sup>Walker, Rhetorical Grammar, p. 51.

<sup>22</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 205.

<sup>23</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Ghinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 302.



A Boston critic was less kind. He characterized Kean's manner of speaking as "the barking style,"<sup>24</sup> and some years later, spoke of the "croakings of Kean."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Clapp, another Boston critic, thought Kean's voice "in the undertones boomed with melancholy music."<sup>26</sup> But it was perhaps the Philadelphia critic who gave the most unbiased opinion of Kean's vocal product, one reflective of the tendency to use "ease" of production as a proof of vocal skill. He noted:

. . . it [Kean's voice] is susceptible of praise in the enunciation of passages of solemn, emphatic tenor, which he does not conceive to require vehemence of tone and velocity of utterance. His cadences are distinct and agreeable in measured and deliberate speech; if his voice is rarely musical, it is not always grating. . . .<sup>27</sup>

Another critic registered delight when an actress left off the falsetto quality of voice she had been using and spoke in her natural tones.<sup>28</sup> From comments such as these, which abound in the theatrical criticism of the time, it would appear that the critic and the elocutionist were in agreement regarding the first two general requirements for vocal excellence. They asked that the performer's voice be easily heard and understood, and that it have a pleasing quality.

Beyond these two general requirements for the actor's vocal product, the elocutionary theory provided critics with even more specific

<sup>24</sup>New England Galaxy, November 30, 1820, n.p.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., October 14, 1825, n.p.

<sup>26</sup>W. W. Clapp, Jr., A Record of the Boston Stage (Boston, 1853), p. 178.

<sup>27</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 301.

<sup>28</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 206.

attributes on which to base their judgment of an actor's excellence or the lack of it. Actors of the day were expected to possess voices of great compass. In the elocutionary theory of the time, "compass" referred to that range of pitch above and below the governing or natural key of the speaker's voice and considered as essential to meet the demands of a "spirited and diversified delivery."<sup>29</sup> This might well account for the fact that even though a New York critic admired the acting of a Mr. Green, he did not admire the actor's voice which, "deficient in harmonious intonation and extent, refuses to enforce the conceptions of his imagination."<sup>30</sup> A more specific reference to the critic's interest in this vocal capacity can be found in a review devoted to Conway's first appearance in New York. One critic stated the major reason for his admiration of this actor was that his voice was of "great compass."<sup>31</sup> In considering this point of emphasis, there appear to be reasons why "compass" of voice became a major concern of both critic and elocutionist. The performer needed wide vocal range to accomplish the transitions which constituted the "startling effects" beloved by audiences of the day. Porter had defined "transition" as a sudden change of voice.<sup>32</sup> We take Porter's work as a good point of reference, since they were not only the most popular of the elocutionary texts, but also represented an excellent synthesis of the works of

<sup>29</sup>Porter, Rhetorical Reader, pp. 56-57.

<sup>30</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], November, 1817, p. 64.

<sup>31</sup>New York Mirror, January 31, 1824, p. 210.

<sup>32</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 120.

Sheridan, Austin, Walker, and others, especially as regards the element of voice. While transitions could be accomplished by a change in pitch, they were not confined to such changes. Porter conceived of transition as embodying all that was concerned with vocal modifications; that is, the change might be accomplished not only by transitions from high to low pitch, but also from high and loud to low and loud, or from a fast to a slow rate of utterance, or even from utterance to pause, or from other combinations of vocal phenomena.<sup>33</sup>

A critic was probably noting a "transition" when he described Forrest's "burst of frenzy on the violator of his kinswoman's honour" as "tremendous." In his enthusiasm over Forrest's skill in employing this abrupt vocal change, he continued, ". . . we have never, by any actor, heard that, or a similar passage, uttered with such appalling force and beauty."<sup>34</sup> In another critic's estimation, Kean suffered by comparison with Cooke, since the latter possessed:

Great strength and variety of voice, whose notes so opposite in their character and yet so full of meaning, the transitions from one to the other often produces the most electrical effect upon the audience. Expressions of rage bursting forth in the fierce accents of his sharp, nasal tones made the auditor start; and when followed by a deep under-breath of menace, or some sentiment of fearful irony or sarcasm accompanied by the sardonic leer of a fiend, it was sufficient to cause a painful shuddering in all who heard it.<sup>35</sup>

This critic went on to say that these transitions had a more powerful effect with Cooke, because he employed them less frequently than did Kean.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 121-122.

<sup>34</sup>New York Mirror, December 8, 1827, p. 171.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., July 8, 1826, p. 399.

The theatrical criticism of this period abounds in references to transitions such as these, and to the "electrifying" effects they had on the audience.

Closely related to compass and transition was the vocal aspect of modulation, a term which generally meant "variety in managing the voice."<sup>36</sup> The actor who possessed good modulation would never be guilty of monotony, "a dull repetition of sound on the same pitch," or of mechanical variety, "unskillful use of the greatest number of notes to produce a variety by frequent and arbitrary change of stress."<sup>37</sup> The basic constituents of modulation were those of inflection and cadence. The former had to do with the upward or downward "turn" of the voice on a single syllable,<sup>38</sup> while cadence referred generally to the melody patterns employed at the ends of phrases or sentences.<sup>39</sup>

Many instances might be noted of the critic's references to the question of the actor's modulation. When Cooper visited Boston in 1818, he was praised for "a voice of great compass, of most melodious silver tone, and susceptible of the greatest variety of modulations."<sup>40</sup> This critic goes on to say that Cooper's "critical knowledge of the inflexions of voice, and his judicious application of them, will always render him a favourite. . . ."<sup>41</sup> At the end of Cooper's engagement, the critic

<sup>36</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 93.

<sup>37</sup>Porter, Rhetorical Reader, p. 48.

<sup>38</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, pp. 42-44.

<sup>39</sup>Enfield, The Speaker, pp. 12-13.

<sup>40</sup>New England Galaxy, December 4, 1818, n.p.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

commented that "his voice, capable of almost every variety of modulation, never disappoints by running into an imperfect cadence."<sup>42</sup> Another critic was happy to notice Mrs. Whitlock's "improvement in the modulation of her voice."<sup>43</sup> Still another called attention to the fact "Mr. Woodhull stormed and swore in a more modulated tone of voice than is his wont when a full house witnesses his misdeeds."<sup>44</sup> The critic who chided Simpson for "muttering" also had occasion to write that his intonations were "so peculiar to himself" that he "could not trace his meaning through the ups and downs of his speech."<sup>45</sup> A Mr. De Camp was taken to task for introducing "too many artificial cadences in his voice to be pleasing to an American ear."<sup>46</sup> In turn, Mr. Caldwell met disapproval because of a "want of command over the inflexions of his voice,--which is dissonant and unmusical. . . ."<sup>47</sup>

The problem of dealing with modulation illustrates one of the difficulties inherent in any attempt to analyze such a complex aspect of delivery as that of vocal technique. The voice is, after all, an entity, operating as a unit. When the elements involved in its use are isolated for study and criticism, they must be selected on an arbitrary basis. It must be realized that no one of the elements of voice ever appears alone in reality, but always in relationship to other aspects of voice

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., December 15, 1820, p. 39.

<sup>43</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], October, 1817, p. 460.

<sup>44</sup>New York Mirror, January 23, 1830, p. 232.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., September 4, 1824, p. 46.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., December 13, 1823, p. 158.

<sup>47</sup>Critic, November 15, 1820, p. 47.



which have the capacity to modify it. Thus it is that, while modulation may generally be said to refer to the modifications of pitch, its meaning may at times be extended to include other vocal changes. Porter, in his discussion of modulation included, not only the pitch factor, but also other modifications such as pause, rate, loudness, and emphasis.<sup>48</sup> Even though we may isolate each of these factors for comment, we must expect to find they frequently overlap and affect each other. For instance, rate may be modified by patterns of emphasis and pause, as in the case of one actor who "considerably retarded the progress of the play by his measured pauses and unmeaning emphasis."<sup>49</sup> Porter thought the remedy for faulty modulation lay in the speaker's acquiring a "spirit of emphasis" which would enable him to choose his emphatic words with regard to the sense of the passage read.<sup>50</sup> As proof that the elocutionist was not merely belaboring an obvious point, but working to improve the delivery of speakers and readers, we need only note one critic's reference to the vocal habits of the actor Barry. The reviewer, in this instance, thought that the actor usually modulated his voice with good effect, until he was called upon to portray a "passion"; then he fell into the error of "laying, without discretion, a most astounding emphasis on every second or third word, which, makes the dialogue jolt along like a hard-trotting horse. . . ."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, pp. 106-118.

<sup>49</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], June, 1817, p. 137.

<sup>50</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 95.

<sup>51</sup>New York Mirror, July 18, 1829, p. 13.



The importance of pause as an element in the speaker's delivery was pointed up by such elocutionists as Sheridan and Walker. The former devoted an entire lecture to the subject in Lectures on Elocution and, in his Lectures on Reading, devised a series of markings which could be placed in a script to indicate the length the pause was to be held.<sup>52</sup> He cautioned the speaker or reader, however, that pauses were to be made in proportion to the importance of the sense, and not merely because of the grammatical structure.<sup>53</sup> Walker, on the other hand, based his fifteen rules for the use of pause on grammatical structure.<sup>54</sup> While he was careful to point out that effective use of this element depended not so much on the number, as on the position, of the pauses, he nevertheless thought that speakers would generally pause every fifth or sixth word.<sup>55</sup> Some elocutionists considered pause in its relationship to other elements of voice. Murray, for instance, considered two kinds of pause: first, an "emphatic pause" used to call the hearer's attention to a particular word or phrase; second, one which marked "distinctions of sense" used only to clarify the meaning.<sup>56</sup> Porter also treated two kinds of pauses, but, unlike those of Murray, he labeled one a "pause of suspension" which required with it a rising inflection and was used to denote that the sense was unfinished; the

<sup>52</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Reading, p. 98.

<sup>53</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, p. 105.

<sup>54</sup>Walker, Rhetorical Grammar, pp. 68-82.

<sup>55</sup>Walker, Elements of Elocution, p. 69.

<sup>56</sup>Murray, English Reader, p. 8.

other he called a "final pause" which required a falling inflection and was to be used at the close of a sentence.<sup>57</sup>

In the case of the critical comments regarding pause, and the efforts to improve this aspect of delivery, we might note the references which suggest its effects, either alone or in combination with other factors, on the manner in which the actor used his voice. For instance, the "sing-song style" of performance which one critic reported as occurring frequently,<sup>58</sup> may have been due to "mechanical enunciations of the old school," or as he noted in the case of another performance, to "pauses frequently too much protracted. . . ."<sup>59</sup> It is possible that actors who were acquainted with the elocutionist's recommendations may have developed such habits of pausing when they disregarded the elocutionist's warning that too mechanical attention to the placing of pauses would result in a monotonous delivery.<sup>60</sup>

One of the major criticisms of the elder Kean was concerned with his employment of the pause. For all the praise that was accorded his performances, Kean was censured for interrupting sentences too much, and pausing between words which the reviewer thought ought not to be separated. As instances of this fault, the critic listed such readings as, "and leave the world for me--to bustle in"; "say then, my peace--is made"; and "learned--fathers of the church."<sup>61</sup> In Boston, the same type

<sup>57</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, pp. 51-54; 63-65.

<sup>58</sup>New York Mirror, July 3, 1824, p. 390.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., July 10, 1824, p. 399.

<sup>60</sup>Murray, English Reader, p. 14.

<sup>61</sup>New York Mirror, February 11, 1826, p. 227.

of criticism was current. Critics there noted Kean's "stubborn, monotonous voice deprives him of the power of pronouncing periods of any considerable length with elegance and beauty--sometimes even with ordinary propriety," as was apparent in his reading of Othello's speech beginning "O now forever,/Farewell the tranquil mind. . . ." <sup>62</sup> In commenting on his delivery of this speech, the critic objected that the "perpetual recurrence of the same tone at every pause in the measure, gave it very much the air of methodistical preaching." <sup>63</sup> In this instance the critic is echoing Murray's concern over the mechanical and monotonous effect which resulted when speakers made the error of employing "a similar tone at every stop, and a uniform cadence at every period." <sup>64</sup> A Philadelphia critic went further in his criticism of Kean's use of pause. He quoted Hazlitt's remark that "every sentence was an alternation of dead pauses and rapid utterance," and agreed with Hazlitt that this manner of speaking was as mechanical and offensive as the "common-place, drawling monotony of other players." <sup>65</sup> The same critic protested that Kean not only introduced long pauses arbitrarily between words, but even "between syllables of the same word." <sup>66</sup> Another instance of the common concern over the use of pause and its effect can be found in a review by a New York critic who compared Kean with Cooke. He insisted:

<sup>62</sup>New England Galaxy, February 16, 1821, p. 74.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Murray, English Reader, p. 14.

<sup>65</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Chincy, Actors on Acting, p. 303.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

The difference between the actors is in nothing more striking than in their use of pauses. It was seldom that Cooke made a halt in the utterance of a speech. . . . Cooke, no doubt sometimes omitted the use of pauses where they might have been introduced with the utmost propriety and effect; and Kean frequently brings them in where they only serve to interrupt the impetuous current of feeling, and weaken the sense of the passage.<sup>67</sup>

A consideration of the problem of pause in the actor's use of voice leads naturally to the problem of rate. The greater the number of pauses a speaker employs, the more likely his rate of utterance will be slowed. The elocutionist's treatment of the problem, as typified by Enfield, usually involved the injunction to use a slow rate.<sup>68</sup> Murray, likewise, spoke of a necessary moderation in rate if the speaker was to be distinct, but cautioned against a drawling manner which would render him monotonous.<sup>69</sup> Theatrical critics, in their consideration of this aspect of voice, found evidence of performers who apparently ignored Murray's warning. A periodical, the Critic, argued that one of Forrest's most obvious faults was "a too slow and stately enunciation, interrupted by frequent pauses--of such passages as require to be spoken in a hurried colloquial manner."<sup>70</sup> In their examination of the actor's skill in employing this elocutionary factor, critics also discovered instances where the actor's lack of skill resulted in the opposite type of abuse, too fast a rate. The Boston Galaxy, commenting on the delivery

<sup>67</sup>New York Mirror, July 8, 1826, p. 399.

<sup>68</sup>Enfield, The Speaker, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup>Murray, English Reader, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup>Critic, December 13, 1828, p. 111.

of the actor, Conway, noted its "graces of declamation" and its "irresistible charm," but added, "If there be a fault in his reading, it is when he summons up all his power to give effect to certain passages and hurries over a succeeding one, equally important, and which ought to be equally impressive."<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, when Mrs. Powell played Lady Randolph in Home's Douglas, the Galaxy commented that some passages were almost lost by the rapidity of her delivery.<sup>72</sup> Maywood, an English actor who gained some degree of reputation in this country, was criticized also for too fast a rate of delivery. In his case, the critic thought the fault might be due to his "zeal to avoid the drawling and measured declamation of the Kemble school. . . ."<sup>73</sup>

Another aspect of the performer's delivery which both critic and elocutionist felt it necessary to treat occasionally was that of loudness. This element of vocal technique has already been mentioned in its relationship to the question of audibility. To judge from the critic's comments, the actors of this period must, at times, have been "injudicious" in the way they applied this attribute of voice. In so doing, they violated the rule, laid down by Porter<sup>74</sup> and echoed by Sheridan and Murray,<sup>75</sup> that the effective speaker uses only as much voice as propriety would permit. Mr. Robertson, for example, "brayed

<sup>71</sup>New England Galaxy, March 26, 1824, n.p.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., October 28, 1825, n.p.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., February 26, 1819, n.p.

<sup>74</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 109.

<sup>75</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, pp. 112-116; see also Murray, English Reader, p. 6.

out with the lungs of a stentor" what, the critic felt, should have been "poured like a leperous distilment into the very porches" of his fellow actor's ears.<sup>76</sup> It would appear that actors, even those of the stature of Forrest, could very well have profited by the instruction on the matter of loudness. At times the actor was probably guilty of using his voice simply to drown out other actors, or to make them appear insignificant. Montrose J. Moses indicates as much in an account of one of Forrest's English tours. It seems that an actor by the name of Gustavus Brooke was engaged to play Iago to Forrest's Othello. Brooke, who had been warned that Forrest always dominated the stage with his vocal power, was prepared to contest his supremacy. In the third act, Moses relates that "Forrest let forth the full volume of his utterance; Brooke replied with a counter volley; Forrest showed his astonishment; he had met his match. It rankled sorely."<sup>77</sup>

The theatrical critic also had a great deal to say about the actor's use of emphasis. The widespread concern with this element of technique is suggested by the fact critics felt it necessary, even when treating the actor's performance in a cursory manner, to include such remarks as "A few passages were given by Mrs. Sloman with good emphasis and discretion";<sup>78</sup> or that Mr. Hilson . . . numbered among his other qualities an emphasis generally just."<sup>79</sup> The critic did not, however,

<sup>76</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 208.

<sup>77</sup>Moses, Forrest, pp. 328-329.

<sup>78</sup>New York Mirror, March 8, 1828, p. 279.

<sup>79</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], January, 1818, p. 213.



always confine himself to such general remarks. He often analyzed the actor's readings minutely, even to the point of indicating the words the actor emphasized, and suggesting the "justness" or "propriety" of other readings. In so doing, he was following the elocutionist's lead. Emphasis was given extensive treatment in the teachings of the elocutionists, with many of their rules being illustrated by marked passages.

While it is not necessary, here, to analyze the complexities which the elocutionists found in this phase of their subject, it might be useful to look at some general theories with regard to it. Walker made a distinction between two kinds of emphasis. He defined particular emphasis as that which employed increase force and inflection corresponding to the meaning. He identified a second type, general emphasis, as that which was not regulated by the sense of the passage read, but by the taste and feeling of the reader.<sup>80</sup> It may have been the actor's over-indulgence in this latter type of emphasis which brought down the critic's censure. Porter limited emphasis to a "distinctive utterance" which best conveys meaning.<sup>81</sup> Murray thought that emphasis should be used in reading according to the pattern found in "common discourse." He also observed that, while some persons use very little emphasis in speaking, others carry it far beyond anything to be found in common discourse, and even sometimes throw it on words which are trifling in themselves. According to Murray, the greatest fault was that of multiplying emphasis too much and using it indiscriminately.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup>Walker, Lectures on Elocution, p. 232.

<sup>81</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 71.

<sup>82</sup>Murray, English Reader, pp. 9-10.

The theatrical criticism of the period contains numerous examples which parallel the elocutionist's treatment of the subject of emphasis. One reviewer, for instance, could not praise Forrest enough for his portrayal of Brutus (in Payne's play), but did notice "one false reading" which he evidently thought was so glaring as to be worthy of correcting. In the line, "The signs that strain the very strings of life," he questioned Forrest's emphasis on the italicized word, and put forth his own opinion that the word life should be the emphatic word.<sup>83</sup> The importance attached to the problem of emphasis and the careful attention given to the actor's application of it is demonstrated by the length to which the critic would go to quote lines, mark the emphatic words, and suggest "correct" or more appropriate readings. One critic took the trouble to note that the following lines should be spoken with emphasis on the italicized words:

Let none but fathers search--they must prevail--  
And yet he was a father who did this!

He pointed out that Mr. Pritchard had not emphasized them in this manner during performance; instead, he had delivered the line as follows:

And yet he was a father who did this!<sup>84</sup>

There are many other examples of this sort of criticism. One critic, reviewing Kean's Richard III, offered the following objection:

We consider he should have laid stress upon the words 'the world,' where he says to his wife, 'the world would call that murder'; instead of letting the whole line slip by without a single emphasis. And we think too, he might be

<sup>83</sup>New York Mirror, December 8, 1827, p. 171.

<sup>84</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 208.

wrong in laying a force upon the word 'thee,' when in courting Lady Anne, he says, 'He lives that loves these better than he could': should the point not have been upon 'he could'?"<sup>85</sup>

These and similar examples indicate the critic, as well as the elocutionist of the period, was greatly concerned with the problem of "correct" emphasis.

Having established the minute attention which the theatrical critics gave to the problems of modulation, rate, pause, loudness, and emphasis during this portion of the nineteenth century, we may now inquire whether the critic's object may not have had its parallel in the elocutionist's stress on the use of these factors in developing the ability to read well. It must be remembered that, at this time, illusionistic character portrayal was not an ideal to be sought after; instead, the interest centered in the performer's exhibition of his talents. Indeed, we have noted practically no reference to character portrayal as such. In the periodical criticism explored in this study, there are but few and scattered references to an actor's portrayal of character in anything like the modern sense of that term. The absence of any significant concern with this factor would suggest that both the critic and the audience were interested in how well the actor used his voice in getting across the force and beauty of the author's conception. In essence, this becomes an interest in the actor's ability to "read" a role well. This interest in the actor's ability to "read" with "justness and propriety" may well have had its origin in the elocutionist's

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<sup>85</sup>New York Mirror, February 11, 1826, p. 227.

distinction between two types of oral situations. These were, first, the situation in which the speaker is delivering his own thoughts; and, second, that in which he is repeating the ideas of another.<sup>86</sup> Sheridan and other elocutionists devoted whole treatises to the art of reading. In these, the elocutionist took the position, that by analyzing the elements of voice and determining how they were used, a reader would be able to communicate the author's meaning. The theatrical critic was merely applying the elocutionary lessons and standards of the day when he showed an interest in whether or not the actor was able to employ modulation, pause, volume, rate, and emphasis in a manner that would supply "propriety," "justness," and "beauty," to his "reading." This attitude is perhaps nowhere better revealed than in the comment which was prompted by revivals of School for Scandal and Twelfth Night. In this instance the critic pointed out that portrayal of a Shakespearean character demands "some person who can entirely comprehend and enjoy the beauties which sparkle through the page, to realize the image of the imagination, and impart the charm of voice, accent, energy, and passion to the silent traces of the poet's fancy."<sup>87</sup> Nowhere in this statement is there any reference to an actor's ability to portray character as we think of it today. The demand is rather for an understanding of the author's material and the vocal capacity to express it well, a requirement which, it might be noted, accorded well with the elocutionist's teachings. This same critic went on to extoll

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<sup>86</sup>William Cockin, The Art of Delivering Written Language (London, 1775), pp. 2-3.

<sup>87</sup>New York Mirror, May 14, 1825, p. 330.

the excellencies of Miss Kelly's acting in these two classics. He thought that, in her hands, "Sheridan's sentiment assumes the garb of poetry, and Shakespeare's poetry is magnified into a wild and enchanted passion which defies the power of voiceless language to describe."<sup>88</sup> Not only did he feel that Miss Kelly was ideally suited to play the female characters of Shakespeare, but he also believed that the speech commencing "Build me a willow cabin at thy gate," was "without exception the finest specimen of reading and declamation" he had ever heard.<sup>89</sup> Another review pointed out that the tones of Miss Kelly's voice were so "various and sweet," and "her reading so scrupulously correct," that every word which she spoke went "home to the heart"<sup>90</sup> (as John Mason had desired those of every performer should do). The tendency to focus attention on the actor's skill in reading is further reflected in a statement from the Galaxy which noted that "violations of sense are so common on the stage, that it was a pleasure to hear Mrs. Henry whose excellence lay in "a clear conception of the meaning; in a correct emphasis; and appropriate cadence."<sup>91</sup> Another critic, who appreciated good reading in the actor, praised Mr. Barry for doing what "not one in a hundred can, that is, read poetry properly. He pronounces distinctly, minds his stops, accentuates his words with judgment, and modulates the tones of his voice with good effect."<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., April 19, 1825, p. 294.

<sup>91</sup>New England Galaxy, April 22, 1825, n.p.

<sup>92</sup>New York Mirror, July 18, 1829, p. 14.



This preoccupation with communicative factors, rather than character portrayal, produced an abundance of references to "faults" in reading. These were by no means limited to the minor actors of the period, nor to the untrained. The critic pointed to "errors" in reading among the great, as well as the minor, actors. A Boston critic, taking note of the faults which Coleman of the New York Evening Post had detected in Kean's reading, thought they were such as "few schoolboys would be guilty of."<sup>93</sup> When Kean finally arrived in Boston, this same critic found him "utterly incapable of elegant and tasteful reading."<sup>94</sup> The Philadelphia critic, "Betterton," apparently agreed with this evaluation of Kean's ability as a "reader," since he wrote, "Mr. Kean has no pretense and indeed, no ability, to keep up numbers. His auditor can have no perception of rhythm or even verse, where a sort of amalgam is made of whole phrases either by hurry or hoarseness of utterance; . . ."<sup>95</sup> In reviews of the period other critics placed a similar premium on good reading. For example, when listing the many good qualities of the actor, Barrett, a Boston critic made a point of the fact that "his reading indicates he understands his author and is willing to repeat what the author set down."<sup>96</sup> When Conway appeared in Boston, the same critic declared, "A great excellence of this gentleman is the correctness of his reading."<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup>New England Galaxy, December 8, 1820, n.p.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., February 16, 1821, p. 74.

<sup>95</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 61.

<sup>96</sup>New England Galaxy, September 20, 1822, n.p.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., February 27, 1824, n.p.



The ability to read well involved the closely-related ability to declaim. The difference between "reading" and "declaiming" was probably only one of degree, the latter being more formal and requiring a more "heightened" form of utterance. Some plays were, indeed, thought to require a declamatory style because of the manner in which they were written. One critic was probably indicating an awareness of this difference when he referred to the language of the play, Rolla, as "that of declamation rather than nature."<sup>98</sup> Similarly, the Galaxy said of Julius Caesar that "its declamatory passages are among the finest specimens of eloquence in our language; and when these are delivered with propriety, they afford an entertainment of the highest kind to a cultivated and refined taste."<sup>99</sup> The actor who could declaim these passages well was usually acclaimed for his ability to do so; for instance, the Boston critic wrote that Duff's style of declamation was "happily adapted" to the speeches of Brutus.<sup>100</sup> Occasionally, however, the actor must have mistaken mere noise and rant for good declamation, for Mr. Price's declamation was described as "more 'raw and gusty' than the 'the troubled Tiber, chafing with his shores.'"<sup>101</sup> In the light of such comments as these, we can but conclude that the ability to declaim was valued as one of the many talents the actor of the period was expected to display, especially in particular scenes which lent themselves readily to oratorical exhibition.

<sup>98</sup>Critic, November 29, 1828, p. 80.

<sup>99</sup>New England Galaxy, November 20, 1818, n.p.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., February 27, 1818, n.p.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., November 20, 1818, n.p.

An exploration of the theatrical criticisms of acting during the period 1815 to 1840 reveals that the critic was much concerned with the manner in which the actor used his voice. The theatrical critic, like the elocutionist, and perhaps because of his pervading influence, placed great importance upon the power and effect achieved by the oral aspect of delivery. Both critic and elocutionist had insisted upon two general standards of vocal usage: first, the speaker's voice must be easily heard and understood; and second, it must be pleasing in its quality. Furthermore, the critic looked for such specific vocal attributes as: compass sufficient for modulation through a wide pitch range, appropriate inflections and cadences, varying degrees of loudness, proper rate of utterance, suitable length and number of pauses, and "justness" in laying emphasis. These factors were considered necessary, in part at least, to accomplish those transitions which thrilled the audiences of that day. Most of all, perhaps, the critic desired that the actor possess these attributes of voice so that he might exhibit the full force and beauty of the playwright's meaning, and be able when it was demanded of him, to adapt his mode of speaking to the declamatory nature of the material.

## CHAPTER IV

### PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF AMERICAN ACTING

" . . . this gentleman's very body thinks  
and reflects." --Mirror

An examination of nineteenth-century American criticism indicates that, in addition to the requirement that the performer meet certain standards of vocal expression, both the critic and the elocutionist recommended goals for his use of bodily action, attitude, gesticulation, and facial expression. It becomes apparent, also, that both critic and elocutionist tended to agree in regard to the standards for effective bodily action, and to share the belief that through training and the judicious application of various rules, those standards could be met.

These views regarding effective bodily action, however, were predicated on the belief or conviction that a performer must first possess some measure of physical endowment before rules regulating bodily movement could prove effective. Austin, an elocutionist who devoted the major part of his study to the physical aspect of the orator's art, thought the rules he had devised the best that could be collected from ancient and modern writers; yet, he was careful to observe that rules could not bestow what nature had denied.<sup>1</sup> Porter

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<sup>1</sup>Austin, Chironomia, Preface, p. x.

agreed that the public speaker's first requisite must be an adequate physique. He took care to point out that "a defect, original or accidental, in the conformation of the body," was one source of "faults of rhetorical action."<sup>2</sup> Speaking in more general terms, but to the same end, Hugh Blair insisted that, to become an artist, a person had to have some measure of genius or talent as a gift from nature. Blair assigned the individual the responsibility of improving these through art and study, but he added the warning that training could not make up for a lack of natural endowment.<sup>3</sup> Such a philosophy found an expression in the Mirror's opinion that no living actor united as much "power and original genius with correct taste and cultivated talents," as Macready, who had nearly all that nature could give plus all that taste and talent could acquire.<sup>4</sup> One critic summed the matter up in these words: "Nature must have done much, and education more, to form a consummate actor."<sup>5</sup>

In view of the importance attached to the actor's physical endowment, we might well expect the critic to look, first of all, for that requisite. That he did so is apparent from Moses's statement that Dunlap and Clapp, in their theatrical criticisms, "had an eye for physical particularities."<sup>6</sup> In this regard Moses also notes, "When

<sup>2</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup>Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (7th Am. ed.; New York, 1817), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>New York Mirror, October 7, 1826, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], August, 1817, p. 302.

<sup>6</sup>Moses, Forrest, p. 27.

critics spoke of Conway's fine figure as being suited to the role of Coriolanus, it becomes apparent that outward dignity, external statuesqueness, the grand manner, were as much parts of the acting of the day as the well-rounded utterance."<sup>7</sup> The sheer stature of Conway had its own statement to make in the estimation of one critic, who wrote as follows:

He is more than six feet in height; his limbs are well-proportioned; and when he becomes animated with his part, he is graceful and dignified in the extreme. . . . his very appearance caused us to experience a thrill of emotion, for much as we had heard of him we did not expect to behold a figure so elegant and impressive. There is something startling in his gigantic form; when warmed by passion, it seems to dilate and become yet more grand, as if the very god Mars walked in our presence.<sup>8</sup>

It would seem that, for the critic of the day, magnificent physiques were required to portray "magnificent" characters. Conversely, a lack of these physical requisites became a factor to be considered in evaluating an actor's fitness for particular roles. Clapp, the Boston critic, was subscribing to this standard when he described Edmund Kean as "scarcely above middle height," and "deficient in dignity of deportment for certain characters."<sup>9</sup> Even the Philadelphia critic, who felt "nature had endowed Mr. Kean with a vigorous genius, and important physical qualities, for his pursuit . . . ,"<sup>10</sup> found it necessary to make a reservation regarding Kean's physical stature. In referring to his muscular frame he observed that it was "well and elegantly shaped, except in the shoulders,

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-34.

<sup>8</sup>New York Mirror, January 31, 1824, p. 210.

<sup>9</sup>Clapp, Boston Stage, p. 178.

<sup>10</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 300.

which, being round and heavy in appearance, detract much from the just effect of his other proportions."<sup>11</sup> A critic of the Albion was far less kind in assessing the effect of a performer's lack of height. He could not remember whether it had been said of Kean or Garrick in the role of Othello that he "appeared like Desdemona's little black boy that handed her her tea-kettle," rather than the warrior he was supposed to be.<sup>12</sup> The degree to which physical endowment was prized in the actor is suggested by the following comment concerning the actor Wallack. This reference, which may be taken as fairly typical, included the opinion that "few men . . . possess so noble a person, or a more intelligent and beautiful countenance."<sup>13</sup>

With such a premium placed on the male physique, it is somewhat surprising that the figures of the actresses received less comment. Nevertheless, it was only occasionally that the critic singled out an actress for her physical charms. When he did, he employed far more general terms than those used to describe the actor. A critic, for instance, dismissed one actress, a Miss Rock, with the rather terse description: "person, small, well-formed; carriage, easy and graceful; countenance, pleasingly expressive, though not handsome. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Even the very popular Clara Fisher received only the passing remark that her face was "charming even in a state of repose" and "lovely indeed"

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Albion, December 24, 1825, p. 221.

<sup>13</sup>New York Mirror, June 5, 1824, p. 355.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., December 1, 1827, p. 167.



when "lighted by feeling."<sup>15</sup> Many of the comments invite the belief that the critic was being gallant in not describing the actress's figure. One reviewer, for example, gave Mrs. Whitlock credit for the "numberless beauties of her performance" in spite of "any little deficiencies, or redundancies, of figure. . . ."<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, some actresses appear to have been able to compensate for their lack of acting ability by displaying a lovely figure. After itemizing the vocal faults of one such person, the critic added, "But what was lost to the ear was made up to the eye; and who will trouble himself about the sounds of words, while gazing on the goddess of beauty?"<sup>17</sup>

It is obvious that, for the critic of the first part of the nineteenth century, a considerable portion of that gift of nature necessary for the actor to possess was a body of good proportions, one capable of embodying the characters he was called on to portray. It is equally true that, however necessary the physical requirements were thought to be, mere physique was not enough to meet the standard which critic and elocutionist set for the orator and actor. These natural capacities were to be trained and improved. It is paradoxical to note, therefore, that some of the greatest actors achieved fame in spite of their lack of stature and physical robustness. It was probably true that, under the spell of great acting, "the audiences forgot their lack of stature and saw only what Byron saw in Kean--a soul; what Coleridge

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1827, p. 76.

<sup>16</sup>Polyanthos, December, 1812, p. 164.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., October, 1812, p. 53.

saw in Kean's Macbeth--flashes of lightning; what Walt Whitman felt in Booth--fire, energy, abandon."<sup>18</sup> Actors of those days aimed to make the pit tremble,<sup>19</sup> and tremble it did.

Audiences of nineteenth-century America evidently expected critics to give minute and detailed criticism of the manner in which the actor physically portrayed his role. One reviewer commented that the theatrical critic must be always on the alert so as not to miss "the most taking and attractive" parts of a performance, since the audience would never let "a word or action" of a performer escape its notice.<sup>20</sup> In assessing the value of the action which the actor employed, the theatrical critic looked for grace and elegance, moderation, appropriateness, and force. As in the case of other points of criticism or standards of evaluation, these were qualities which the elocutionist looked for in the public speaker's delivery.<sup>21</sup> Austin, we discover, wanted the orator to have grace and decorum in his bodily action.<sup>22</sup> Sheridan, on the other hand, desired the speaker or reader to possess force and grace; the former as a gift of nature, the latter acquired through art.<sup>23</sup> Walker set as his standard "a just and elegant adaptation of every part of the body to the nature and import of the subject."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Moses, Forrest, p. 31.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>New York Mirror, July 25, 1835, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup>Haberman, in History of Speech Education, p. 110.

<sup>22</sup>Austin, Chironomia, pp. 1924-5.

<sup>23</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, p. 153.

<sup>24</sup>Walker, Elements of Elocution, p. 301.

The critic tended to prize these same qualities, and we find an actress, Mrs. Barnes, being praised because her "action was graceful and appropriate."<sup>25</sup> The same critic, doling out censure for the lack of these qualities, reported that the role of Henry, in Speed the Plough, was played by some stranger whose manners and action were stiff and only occasionally expressive and appropriate.<sup>26</sup> In 1824, when Cooper and Conway were exchanging roles in Venice Preserved at every other performance, one critic thought Cooper's playing of Jaffier "chaste" and "elegant," with none of the affectation noticed in other performers of this role. While he found Cooper's "every movement and action . . . elegant and proper . . .,"<sup>27</sup> he thought Conway's physical portrayal so "uncouth" and "unbecoming" that he would not even have recognized the play being performed without the aid of the handbill. Another instance of the critics' tendency to share the elocutionists' views regarding the role and importance of bodily action can be found in a comment on Cooper's version of the dagger scene in *Macbeth*. In this case the critic of the American Monthly thought Cooper's performance admirable because "he gave effect to every word," with his physical movement.<sup>28</sup> This, of course, is completely in accord with Austin's belief that, in many passages a speaker or reader might be called on to deliver, each word was so important that it should be marked with

<sup>25</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], August, 1817, p. 298.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 300.

<sup>27</sup>New York Mirror, April 10, 1824, p. 291.

<sup>28</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 210.

bodily action.<sup>29</sup> Austin and other elocutionists were careful, however, to caution the performer against too much bodily action.<sup>30</sup> Performers who followed the recommendation, but ignored the warning, called down criticism typified by that directed against the actor Barry. While Barry was commended for his playing of a sailor's role, he was advised to "prune away certain excrescences" of action. The critic was aware that "while sailors are occasionally in the habit of rolling as they walk--throwing up their heels--masticating tobacco--and hoisting their inexpressibles--there is no reason in nature why they should be incessantly going through one of these evolutions."<sup>31</sup> Other violations of the rule concerning excessive physical action may be noted in the Critic's objection to the elder Booth's "redundancy of action," which the reviewer considered this actor's "great and besetting sin."<sup>32</sup> The following month, however, this same critic commended the comedian, Barrett, because of his "degree of ease and vivacity," and for the fact that, when he was on stage, there was no pause in the action, no waiting for cues. While the critic is obviously referring to the action of the play as a whole, the fact remains that he attributed its excellence to the actor's animation which, in his eyes, gave life even to the "dull clods supporting him."<sup>33</sup> Activity for the

<sup>29</sup>Austin, Chironomia, pp. 414-446.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.; see also Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 160.

<sup>31</sup>New York Mirror, February 24, 1827, p. 247.

<sup>32</sup>Critic, November 15, 1828, p. 45.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., December 6, 1828, p. 95.

sake of activity rarely, if ever, received any commendation from the critic. Mr. Simpson, in one production, received no praise from the critic even though he "was certainly very active and busy. . . ." <sup>34</sup> This aversion to too much action caused the Galaxy, on one occasion, to note the improvement of Mr. Pride, whose fault had been "an exuberance of breath and action." <sup>35</sup> The extremes to which some actors evidently went to appear active on the stage is exemplified by the performer who was requested, in the event he was not actually afflicted with St. Vitus's dance, to spare the audience "some of his convulsive twitches, and to stand still for one second, at a time, if possible." <sup>36</sup> Even Kean came in for his share of this kind of censure. One critic did not agree with the reviewers who claimed Kean merited praise because he appeared to throw his whole soul into the characters he portrayed. Instead, he found Kean's portrayal characterized by "excessive action." He thought Kean guilty of constantly "running about the stage, beating his breast, or alternately clenching and opening his hands, fumbling about his neck, [making] sudden starts and rapid transitions. . . ." <sup>37</sup> Furthermore, he complained that when "addressing other performers:-- he [Kean] steps furiously up to them, thrusts his face into theirs, and having finished his speech, rushes from them with a rapidity which

<sup>34</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 206.

<sup>35</sup>New England Galaxy, November 27, 1818, n.p.

<sup>36</sup>American Monthly Magazine, quoted in Odell, Annals, I, 479.

<sup>37</sup>New England Galaxy, February 23, 1821, p. 78.

nothing but the stage box can arrest."<sup>38</sup> A similar viewpoint was demonstrated by a New York critic who took issue with a "morning paper's" recommendation that "a little dash of the Kean style" would give "finish and picture" to Cooper's playing of Virginus. This critic asked his readers to imagine Cooper departing from one of his attitudes which "Jove might envy and Apollo attempt to imitate in vain" in order to thump his breast with a truncheon or gauntlet, and stalk in "solemn mockery" across the stage. Such activity on Cooper's part would, he believed, serve only to excite the hisses, not the applause, of the audience.<sup>39</sup>

Although the critic readily condemned action which was inelegant or excessive, he was also quick to censure an actor for employing too little action. The elder Booth, whose "redundancy of action" had been noted on some occasions, was guilty at other times of transgressing too far in the other direction. The American, for example, found "something tame" in this actor's level scenes.<sup>40</sup> In 1831, the Mirror saw fit to report Booth's performance of Sir Giles Overreach was "a spiritless affair." In that instance, except for a few "bursts of excellence," the critic thought he "shuffled along" with unpardonable carelessness, content to give the audience only a "few touches" now and then. Such a manner of playing, the critic asserted, gave the appearance of an artist "who finishes a face here, and an arm there--and leaves all the groups and landscape in the background rudely sketched."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>New York Mirror, September 27, 1823, p. 70.

<sup>40</sup>Quoted from the American, in Odell, Annals, III, 13.

<sup>41</sup>New York Mirror, September 13, 1831, p. 71.



When the actor employed bodily activity which was appropriate and forceful, he was certain to be praised. The appeal of forceful and appropriate action to the audience of the day is reflected in Washington Irving's account of a scene in which Cooke played Iago to Kemble's Othello:

In the scene in which Iago instils his suspicions, Cooke grasped Kemble's left hand with his own, and then fixed his right like a claw on his shoulder. In this position, drawing himself up to him with his short arm, he breathed his poisonous whispers. Kemble coiled and twisted his hands, writhing to get away, his right hand clasping his brow, and darting his eye back on Iago. It was wonderful.<sup>42</sup>

Even action of a violent sort was commended in the actor when the play was thought to demand it. A Boston critic, for example, believed the role of Glenroy afforded "ample scope for the highest powers of an actor," since it demanded "rapid transitions from paroxysms of joy to those of grief, and from affection to indignation."<sup>43</sup> Such action, in the critic's estimation, could be accomplished only by an actor with the extraordinary "powers of mind and command of limb and feature," needed to exhibit these gradations of emotion correctly and to give the spectator a sense of their reality.<sup>44</sup> References to a performance by Charles Kean serve as an additional index to this concept of appropriateness. On this occasion the younger Kean was praised for his "clear, melodious and distinct reading," which was better suited to the "moral

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<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton, Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States: From the Days of David Garrick to the Present Time (5 vols.; New York, 1886), II, 6.

<sup>43</sup>New England Galaxy, April 3, 1818, n.p.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

lesson" of Hamlet than excessive "gesticulation and action."<sup>45</sup> Although this critic appeared to approve a vocal emphasis in the playing of Hamlet, he nevertheless took note of Kean's "fine action throughout, the chasteness of his gesticulation, [and] his thorough acquaintance with . . . the business of the play," features which made his Hamlet a "most finished performance."<sup>46</sup>

In general, it might be said that the critic's standards for the actor's stage action were the same as those which were admired by the elocutionists. Just as Sheridan, Walker, Austin, Porter and other elocutionists recommended grace, moderation, force, and appropriateness as the qualities which should characterize the speaker's bodily action, the theatrical critic recommended them as virtues to be cultivated by the actor. The performer was praised when he conformed to the requirements, and censured when he failed to do so.

The problem of analyzing the actor's bodily action is somewhat similar to that of analyzing his use of voice. Although various elements may be isolated for comment, we must remember that these attitudes, gestures, and facial expressions are integral parts of action as a whole. Each affects, or is affected by, every other component. The matter of attitude to which the theatrical critic gave much of his attention, was in reality an inseparable part of the actor's stage action and helped form its character. Nevertheless, like each of the other elements, attitude had its own statement to make apart from its involvement in the

<sup>45</sup>New York Mirror, September 25, 1830, p. 94.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

larger pattern of the stage action. From the critics' many references to "picturesque" and "graceful" attitudes, it is clear that "attitude" was a term which was applied to the actor's bodily positions or postures. It is also apparent that these positions were "struck" and held for a period of time; in some cases, too long a time, according to the critic.<sup>47</sup> By turning to the elocutionist, moreover, we can get a precise picture of what these attitudes were like. Austin, for instance, advised the orator to adopt such attitudes and positions as were consistent with manly and simple grace. [The toes were to be turned moderately outward; the limbs disposed so as to support the body with ease and, at the same time, be subject to change with facility; the leg and thigh braced, but not contracted; and the knee straightened.] While Austin did not define attitude per se, the preceding instructions call forth a picture which might well be that of an actor of the nineteenth-century "teapot school." As for the trunk of the body, Austin thought that it should be well-balanced and sustained erect on the supporting limbs except when attitudes required the body to be inclined.<sup>48</sup> In this connection, we might note that the Galaxy, in reviewing a reading by Duff, commended his appropriate "reclining posture" on the line: "The vanquish'd victor sunk upon her breast." The reviewer called attention to the fact that, following the line, the reader should have made a pause until he recovered his erect position. Mr. Duff, however, must have maintained this attitude much too long, since

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<sup>47</sup>New England Galaxy, December 5, 1817, n.p.

<sup>48</sup>Austin, Chironomia, pp. 298-305.

the reviewer observed that he "preserved the recumbent state of his body through two or three lines."<sup>49</sup> Another requirement which Austin made for the employment of attitude was that the position assumed must be capable of being varied easily. That condition required that the weight of the body be on one leg, with the other leg so placed as to be able to relieve it promptly. In addition, the foot on which the weight rested was to be placed so that a perpendicular line from the "hole of the neck" would pass through the heel of that foot.<sup>50</sup> Additional light is shed on the critic's use of the term by Porter's inference that attitude, in the theatrical sense of the term, had a more specific meaning than that of "general positions of the body" which his elocutionary writings assigned to it. He did, however, point out that an erect attitude might denote "majesty," "activity," or "strength"; while leaning attitudes expressed, among other things, "affection" or "indolence."<sup>51</sup> The English critic, Hazlitt, has left what is probably one of the most vivid accounts of what an actor's attitude might embody, and how it might impress both critic and audience. Describing the death scene in Edmund Kean's Richard III, Hazlitt said,

He fought like one drunk with wounds; and the attitude in which he stands with his hands stretched out, after his sword is taken from him, had a preternatural and terrific grandeur, as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had power to kill.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>New England Galaxy, January 2, 1818, n.p.

<sup>50</sup>Austin, Chironomia, pp. 295-296.

<sup>51</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, pp. 148, 151.

<sup>52</sup>W. A. Darlington, The Actor and His Audience (London, 1949), p. 111.

In another place Hazlitt spoke of the "novelty and propriety" of Kean's action, and his ability to present a "series of striking pictures" which gave "perpetually fresh shocks of delight and surprise."<sup>53</sup> These "striking pictures" were the attitudes through which the actor revealed his concept of a character in a particular situation. This is best illustrated by an American critic's report that "Mr. Kean's attitudes are at all times good; but the exquisite dignity of a kind of fencing posture in the fourth act, when he poises his falchion and addresses it with, 'Come forth, my honest sword,' made the finest attitude we ever beheld upon the stage. . . ."<sup>54</sup> When Austin's description of attitude, which has the characteristics of the aforementioned "fencing position," is equated with Murdoch's description of the "teapot style" of acting, it is possible to arrive at a fairly clear picture of an actor in an attitude.

In the employment of the factor of attitude to demonstrate concepts of character, or to picture the plight of a character in a particular situation, we might expect the actor, in making transitions from one pose or posture to another, to appear highly mechanical. There are indications in the theatrical criticism that attitudes sometimes might have been marred by the actor's "stubborn inflexibility of limb and feature, which refuses to bend to the power of understanding, and defeats the intended effect of a judicious conception,"<sup>55</sup> or that

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>54</sup>New York Mirror, February 11, 1826, p. 227.

<sup>55</sup>New England Galaxy, October 5, 1821, p. 206.



an actor's attitude, although manly and graceful, might be less effective because the actor accompanied it by "a certain stiffness or fulness of chest."<sup>56</sup> The comments of the theatrical critics lead us to believe, however, that such a device, in the hands of a superior actor, could become a potent factor by which the actor could affect the emotions of an audience. The kind of statement which the critic found in the actor's use of attitude is revealed in a Galaxy review which gave a summary of Cooper's acting technique. The reviewer thought Cooper inferior only to John Kemble in "dignified deportment and picturesque attitude."<sup>57</sup> Referring to Cooper's performance of Brutus in the play by Payne, the critic observed that his attitudes were "so noble and apparently unaffected," that a sculptor might have studied them with advantage.<sup>58</sup> Further testimony to the skill of Cooper in using attitudes occurs in a long and laudatory article which a Mirror critic wrote in 1823 concerning Cooper's portrayal of Damon. The critic described the attitude in which Cooper depicted the first realization of his "cruel, terrible situation" when he suspected that Pythias had been executed in his stead. The critic took note of the "flash of suspicion that crossed his mind, and the whole withering truth bursting upon him, . . . all the agonizing emotions of his agonizing emotions of his soul, . . . gathered into the single expression, 'Almighty gods!' [as] he stands the picture of mute despair."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>New York Mirror, November 15, 1823, p. 123.

<sup>57</sup>New England Galaxy, December 31, 1819, n.p.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>New York Mirror, September 20, 1823, p. 61.



The critic went on to say that Lucullus, Damon's servant in the play, gazed upon this attitude of Cooper in "his terrible convulsions as a man would venture to look into the crater of the burning Etna."<sup>60</sup>

But if the critic could read all these things into the attitude assumed by the actor at this point, it is probable, from the critic's further comment that the audience was even more powerfully affected by an attitude which Cooper next assumed. The critic says that Cooper turned from this attitude to vent his rage on his servant and seized him by the throat. While the servant desperately struggled to free himself from this death-grip of his master, Cooper evidently assumed another attitude which the critic described as one in which "he stood a monument in mute fury, like the lofty form of Hercules, strangling to death the conquered lion of Nemeaea."<sup>61</sup> So powerful, indeed, was the effect of this attitude of Cooper's that, according to the critic's account, "many of the audience rose on their feet," uttering "exclamations of astonishment."<sup>62</sup> Having achieved the effect intended with the assumption of the attitude, Cooper then "dragged off the struggling Luculus, amidst loud and reiterated thunders of applause."<sup>63</sup> Such references to the actor's use of this physical factor of the actor's technique lead us to believe that attitude could be, and obviously many times was, highly effective in assisting the actor to depict character and emotion.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

Another aspect of bodily action, to which the critic gave special consideration, was that of gesture. In the period we are studying, the term "gesture" could refer to the action and position of any part of the body.<sup>64</sup> It also had the more limited meaning which involved only the movement of the hands and arms. For this discussion, we are interested in gesture in this latter sense. The correspondence we find between the elocutionist's precepts for gesture and the usage of the stage is a very close one. Austin, for instance, thought the theatre provided public speakers with the only correct models for gesture.<sup>65</sup> In his opinion, the public speaker had a great deal in common with the actor, for he, too must be able to judge when the air is to be divided by the arm and when he is to move his head, body, limbs, and how he is to do all this with effectiveness, propriety, and grace.<sup>66</sup> Porter probably agreed with Austin that the actor's gestures might well be copied by the public speaker, for he had approved of Whitefield's "boldness and variety of action bordering on that of the stage," and his gesture which the elocutionist thought almost as authoritative as Caesar's.<sup>67</sup>

The theatrical critic, like the elocutionist, considered gesture a highly important item of the performer's technique and thought a good part of the actor's power lay in his ability to use this element of

<sup>64</sup>Austin, Chironomia, p. 133.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>67</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 157, fn.

action effectively. The power which the critic thought this factor of physical action to have is perhaps nowhere better stated than in one critic's reference to Kean's use of gestures. Speaking of the actor's portrayal of Richard III, the critic declared,

. . . we could almost perceive the monarch's thought and wishes from the mere play of Mr. Kean's fingers. And this, indeed, connected with his bye-play [sic], is one of the best proofs of his being a great actor: for you may perceive his desires and expectations even from the nervous motion of his extremities, and fancy that this gentleman's very body thinks and reflects.<sup>68</sup>

One of the most enthusiastic responses to an actor's skill in the use of gesture was recorded by James Gould who believed that no other actor had ever achieved such control over the "vital and involuntary functions" as had J. B. Booth. "He would tremble from head to foot," said Gould, "or tremble in one outstretched arm to the finger tips, while holding it in the firm grasp of the other hand. . . ."<sup>69</sup>

The measure of importance attached to this aspect of delivery is suggested by the minuteness of detail with which critics treated the gestures of actors. One critic, speaking of an actor named Caldwell, said that, in the use of his arms, this comedian was unusually stiff. While walking about the stage, according to this critic, he would let his arms dangle from his shoulders at an angle of forty-five degrees; and when he sat down, instead of letting his hands recline in some easy position, he would fidget with his gloves or smooth his hose.<sup>70</sup> We might

<sup>68</sup>New York Mirror, February 11, 1826, p. 227.

<sup>69</sup>Quoted in Dutton Cook, Hours with the Players (new ed.; London, 1883), p. 218.

<sup>70</sup>Critic, November 15, 1828, p. 47.

note, in passing, that in letting his arms "dangle at the forty-five degree angle" Caldwell may have been following one of Walker's pre-descriptions for the orator's gesture, one obviously no longer esteemed by the critic. Walker had cautioned the speaker, when finishing a gesture to let the arm "drop lifeless down to the side," but he added, "The utmost care must be taken to keep the elbow from inclining to the body, and to let the arms, when not hanging at rest by the side, approach to the action we call a-kimbo [sic]."71

The theatrical critic, while condemning excessive or unmeaning gesture, praised the actor when he employed gestures that were meaningful and which had a telling effect on the audience. Conway's use of gesture, when playing Coriolanus, was described by the critic as being excellent because it was "devoid of rant, or ill-timed energy."72 Later when Conway was playing Othello, his death scene was reported to have brought bravos from the audience. It is obvious that the critic gave due credit to the effectiveness of Conway's gestures. His account of the scene stated:

When he had plunged the steel to his heart, and felt that he was near death, it seemed the thought of his Desdemona stole over his dying moments; and even as he was falling, he made an attempt to reach the cold form of her he had loved so well--He turned himself around, but unable to reach her, he stretched forth his arms and gazed for moment upon her; then fell lifeless to the ground.73

It would appear, then, the critic expected the actor to perform his role, using gestures with ease and grace and telling effect. From the detail

71Walker, Elements on Elocution, p. 305.

72New York Mirror, January 31, 1824, p. 21.

73Ibid., February 7, 1824, p. 219.

with which the critic treated the subject, we must consider that gesture formed one item by which the actor's excellence, or the lack of it, was measured.

Facial expression, like the other facets of bodily activity, received its due share of attention from the theatrical critic. That it was an important part of the actor's technique is demonstrated in the comment of one critic that John Reeves's "face alone, like that of Liston, has saved many a stupid farce and melodrama from irretrievable failure."<sup>74</sup> Critic and audience looked to the actor to make use of his facial expression as one element of his technique in portraying character and emotion. Dutton Cook thought Charles Kean's "solemn fixedness of facial expression" aided him in giving "the effect of concentration and intensity to many of his performances."<sup>75</sup> Lewes, however, did not agree and thought the younger Kean's face "utterly without physiognomical play." Lewes went on to accuse young Kean of holding "one stolid expression immovable as an ancient mask" throughout a scene, in contrast to his father's unforgettable looks," which were "terrible to fellow-actors no less than to spectators."<sup>76</sup>

The critics and writers, however, did not always confine themselves to such general comments. They wrote of the actor's facial expression in much more specific language, and in language resembling that of the dicta of the elocutionists on the subject. The theatrical

<sup>74</sup>New York Mirror, November 14, 1835, p. 158.

<sup>75</sup>Cook, Hours with Players, p. 352.

<sup>76</sup>George Henry Lewes, On Actors and the Art of Acting (London, 1875), pp. 109-112.

critic, in dealing with facial expression, was almost sure to notice the manner in which the actor used his eyes. In doing so, he was echoing Porter who felt that the eye was the most important feature of the face, since it was the most instantly responsive.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, most of the elocutionists offered the critic some basis or justification for scrutinizing this aspect of bodily expression. Sheridan noted the power of facial expression, or "looks," to use his term. While Sheridan felt no rules could be laid down for either "looks" or gestures,<sup>78</sup> Austin went so far as to enumerate motions and positions of the head, and the various "looks" of the eyes.<sup>79</sup>

In surveying the references which exemplify this detailed emphasis on facial expression, we find that Forrest was said to be "in eye, brilliant and quick; and in general expression of face, pliable and intelligent."<sup>80</sup> A front page article in the Galaxy, served as even more immediate proof of the importance attached to this aspect of bodily expression. The article, entitled "The Eye," echoed the elocutionist's opinion that the eye was the most expressive feature of the face, that it was the "soul's mirror." For this writer, the major attraction of the actor was principally in the expression of his eyes. What is even more significant from the standpoint of this study is that the writer, quotes "an excellent writer upon elocution" to the effect that "The eye shews the very spirit in a visible form. In every different state

<sup>77</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, pp. 155-156.

<sup>78</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, pp. 144-153.

<sup>79</sup>Austin, Chironomia, pp. 349-354.

<sup>80</sup>American Monthly Magazine, July 1, 1834, p. 36.



of mind, it assumes a different appearance. Joy brightens it; grief adorns it with tears. . . ."81 To anyone familiar with James Burgh's style of describing the various emotions, it is readily apparent that the passage has been quoted verbatim from his text--or at any rate, from one of the many books that included Burgh's "Rules for Expressing with Propriety, the Principal Passions and Humors which Occur in Reading or Public Speaking."<sup>82</sup> The critical comments which followed Pemberton's New York debut provide still another example of the application of this standard of judgment. The critic wrote of him that he had a "fine eye, expressive and flexible features."<sup>83</sup> Later, on the basis of his belief that "the eye is the speaking organ of the soul," and that in it "we discover, as in a mirror, what passes in the mind," the critic found Pemberton's strong point to be "intelligence of countenance."<sup>84</sup> The Boston critic who could find very little to praise in Kean's acting, did concede him an "excellent eye, and a face which may be called good--though the features are not remarkably distinct. . . ."85

The actor of early nineteenth-century America was, we must conclude, criticized minutely for the physical endowments he possessed, and for the manner in which he used, or failed to use, them. The critic,

<sup>81</sup>New England Galaxy, October 11, 1822, n.p.

<sup>82</sup>See, for instance, William Scott, Lessons in Elocution (New York, 1802), p. 312. The Table of Contents identifies this section as taken from Burgh.

<sup>83</sup>New York Mirror, July 10, 1824, p. 399.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1824, p. 407;

<sup>85</sup>New England Galaxy, March 23, 1821, p. 94.

like the elocutionist, insisted that all bodily activity should be performed with grace, ease, propriety, and elegance. These standards applied to all phases of the actor's character portrayal: the broad movement which made up the stage action, the attitudes which the actor assumed, the gestures he made, and the play of facial expression.

## CHAPTER V

### PORTRAYAL OF EMOTION AS A FACTOR IN AMERICAN ACTING

" . . . an anarchy of the passions . . . struggling  
to get violent possession of . . . soul and . . .  
body."  
--Hazlitt

The analysis of the actor's portrayal of emotion as a criterion of acting skill presents a somewhat different problem from an analysis of such criteria as pronunciation, voice, and bodily action. An actor on the American stage during that part of the nineteenth century treated in this study was expected to affect his audience with an exciting display of the emotional content of the drama. This facet of the actor's art presents a broader complex than the factors of "correct pronunciation," "proper vocal usage," and "graceful bodily action." Insofar as the portrayal of emotion is concerned, these latter factors become instrumental techniques and serve as a "means" to accomplish an "end." The critic, then, awarded the palm to the actor who could employ his vocal attributes and bodily movements in such a way as to achieve an emotional effect. The analysis of this more complex element of emotional portrayal requires a somewhat different approach from that employed in the foregoing chapters which were devoted to the "tools" of the actor's trade. It necessitates, first, a look at the critic's and elocutionist's views regarding emotion as the end to which the performer should employ his voice and bodily action. Once these are established, it will be

possible to consider the importance which both critic and elocutionist attached to the performer's ability to make a powerful appeal to the emotions of the audience.

Criticisms of the period suggest that the critic was familiar with a body of material which standardized, or tended to standardize, emotional portrayal, in terms of outward manifestations of voice and bodily action. Indeed, for half a century or more, portrayal of emotion had been the source of a long-standing argument in discussions of the art of acting. Two diametrically opposed schools of thought grew up as a result of the controversy. Diderot's Le paradoxe sur le comedien (c. 1773) served as the focal point of this controversy in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Diderot's extreme position was that the actor was best when he "imitated" the emotion he sought to portray, not when he felt it.<sup>1</sup> The elocutionist's position concerning the problem of emotion bears some resemblance to that of Diderot. Not all the elocutionists treated the subject of emotional portrayal in detail. Those who did, however, listed the various types of emotions and indicated the appropriate vocal and gesture patterns for each, together with rules for applying them.<sup>2</sup> The first, and perhaps the most influential of this group, was James Burgh who believed that "every part of the human frame contributes to the expression of the passions, emotions of the mind, and show its present state."<sup>3</sup> In demonstrating his thesis, Burgh listed

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<sup>1</sup>Denis Diderot, The Paradox of Acting, reprinted in Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup>Daniel E. Vanderaegen, "Thomas Sheridan and the Natural School," SM, XX (1953), 60.

<sup>3</sup>Burgh, Art of Speaking, p. 13.

seventy-six<sup>4</sup> "humors or passions" and explained how each could be expressed through attitudes, looks, gestures, and language."<sup>5</sup> Sheridan also thought the signs of the passions were "tones, looks, and gestures."<sup>6</sup> Sheridan did not describe in detail the emotions and their "signs" as did Burgh. He did, however, follow the general trend of the elocutionists and suggested that the eyes could portray humility, pride, cruelty, compassion, reflection; and that the hand could demand, promise, call, dismiss, threaten, ask, and deny.<sup>7</sup> He thought that, as every passion had its particular tone, so it also had its peculiar look or gesture.<sup>8</sup>

In some respects, however, the elocutionists' views were nearer to what Vandraegen called the "romantic" tendency of the time than to the position of Diderot. As a result, the body of theory available to the critics also included the belief that emotion, to be properly expressed, must not only be felt strongly by the individual performer, but also expressed spontaneously, and not according to set or accepted patterns.<sup>9</sup> Sheridan himself thought that no rules could be given for the tones, looks, and gestures which were to be associated with a given

<sup>4</sup>The number varies with the scholar counting them. On this point, see W. M. Parrish, "The Burglarizing of Burgh, or the Case of the Purloined Passions," QJS, XXXVIII (December, 1952), 433, fn.

<sup>5</sup>Haberman, in History of Speech Education, p. 114.

<sup>6</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, p. 130.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Vandraegen, "Thomas Sheridan and the Natural School," SM, XX (1953), 60.

emotion.<sup>10</sup> It is also possible to find some traces of the "romantic" tendency in Walker's views concerning the portrayal of emotion. In spite of his warning that "our natural feelings are not always to be commanded," and his arguments for the "need of the regulation" and the "ability to produce the semblance of them [feelings] when . . . not actually impassioned," he stated that "if possible, the expression of every passion ought to commence within."<sup>11</sup> This viewpoint is not too far removed from Murray's statement that defective reading was due to the suppression of "all the various, natural, expressive tones of speech" and the substitution for them of "a few artificial unmeaning reading notes."<sup>12</sup>

While the established concepts concerning the portrayal of emotion were admittedly broad, the elocutionist's position is perhaps, in general, closer to that of Diderot than to that of the emotionalist who thought sensibility a sine que non of the histrionic art. Indeed, even when they recommended spontaneous expression of emotion they added that some control must be exercised over these "spontaneous" expressions. At least they were to be given some degree of grace and ease through artful modification. It may be that the line which divided the "emotionalists" from the "mechanists" was in reality an extremely tenuous one. As a case in point, it is possible to turn to criticisms of the acting of Edmund Kean who was considered a natural and

<sup>10</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, pp. 143, 153.

<sup>11</sup>Walker, Elements of Elocution, pp. 315-316; 310.

<sup>12</sup>Murray, English Reader, p. 12.



spontaneous actor by many critics.<sup>13</sup> Yet for all the spontaneity and impulsiveness which critics found in his acting, he himself did not consider his acting "spontaneous or impulsive." He insisted, "All is premeditated and studied beforehand."<sup>14</sup> A Philadelphia critic said Kean left nothing to the inspiration of the moment.<sup>15</sup> Likewise Lewes noted that he "vigilantly and patiently rehearsed every detail, trying the tones, until his ear was satisfied."<sup>16</sup>

In accordance with, or possibly on the basis of, the standardized body of material governing the portrayal of emotion, the critics evidenced a marked concern over how the actor "played" the particular emotion, and the "means" by which he accomplished his effect. Indeed, one critic seems to have felt that it required genuine ability to "portray" an emotion, even beyond the actor's ability to assimilate the actual feeling. For example, he said of Brown's performance of Othello that, although labour and perseverance could accomplish much, they could not supply the deficiencies of this actor who "may actually feel rapture, [and the] pangs of jealousy of Othello, but if he cannot make it appear to his audience that he feels, may make them feel, and sympathize, what is the use of labour?"<sup>17</sup> The basic idea of this critic, that it was important for the actor to make the audience feel the emotion, is

<sup>13</sup>Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, pp. 297-298.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 301.

<sup>16</sup>Lewes, Actors and the Art of Acting, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup>New England Galaxy, October 29, 1819, n.p.

reflected in the elocutionist's treatment of this phase of the oral arts.

The critics of the period went to great lengths to describe how the actor used his voice and body as instruments to achieve the emotional effects considered so essential. For instance, when dealing with the physical aspects of acting in relation to the portrayal of the emotion in Payne's play Brutus, a New York critic took note of Cooper's "quick eye flashing out his indignation in spite of himself--the majesty of his position, gesture, voice, frequently displacing the fool's awkwardness--and his whole great spirit unable to brook the insult around--breaking like lightning among the clouds, through the dark disguise in which he would hide its fire. . . ."<sup>18</sup> The critic went on to say:

The genius of Mr. Cooper is always powerful and he never fails to do himself honour where there is strong passion tearing the heart, that is too haughty to show its power --where two different emotions are striving for mastery --or where he can wrap himself in lofty meditation, and display the outline of his fine figure in some striking position. But when the feelings become too strong for longer reserve--when passion, like a mighty flood, breaking down all obstacles, will have way, and goes forth in its fury, scorning every opposition--then it is that Mr. Cooper rises to the height of histrionic excellence, and exhibits specimens of acting seldom, if ever, surpassed.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of the preceding criticism, it is clear that the reviewer is interested in the physical "means" by which the actor depicted emotion. Bodily action, however, was not the only "means" which the critic associated with the portrayal of emotion. A Boston critic, in commenting on Conway's *Othello*, had occasion to deal with this

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<sup>18</sup>New York Mirror, October 25, 1823, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

actor's use of voice as a "means" of exhibiting emotion. He said:

The voice has two distinct keys for the utterance of passion; one, loud, rapid, and boisterous as the howling of the storm; the other low, studied, and deep as the far-off roll of the rising thunder-cloud. . . . The one startles, stirs, and agitates the hearer; excites tumult in his thoughts, and quickens his pulse; the other fixes his feelings in cold and unearthly stillness, checks the course of his blood, and sends it back in fearless [sic] to his heart.<sup>20</sup>

This critic further commented:

The great art of the tragedian is to distinguish between these, and to use them appropriately. This peculiarized (we take the liberty to coin a word,) Mr. Conway's Othello. When Iago succeeds in impressing him with a firm belief of Desdemona's treachery, he exclaims--"I'll tear her all to pieces!" Now a common actor of common discernment would tear his lungs "to pieces" in uttering this, and crack the tympanum of every ear within hailing distance. Not so did Conway; he gave these words in that hollow subdued tone which seems to be striving with passion for utterance, and succeeding with the greatest difficulty.<sup>21</sup>

The theatrical concept of the role of voice in creating passion bears a striking resemblance to the views Sheridan had on the subject. In treating the emotions, Sheridan pointed out that when the proper tone which belonged to an emotion, was employed by the performer, it could awaken the proper emotion in the hearer. He thought that the "tones" expressive of such emotions as sorrow, mirth, joy, hatred, love, and pity were the same for all nations and could arouse emotions in the audience even when the words were not understood.<sup>22</sup> The commentaries of the period suggest

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<sup>20</sup>New England Galaxy, February 27, 1824, n.p.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, p. 131.

it was not unusual to exercise judgment on this basis. A New York critic, impressed with the many excellencies of Miss Kelly, thought she had a "tone of voice for every emotion," and that it could almost be understood even if the words were those of a foreign language.<sup>23</sup> An adverse criticism of Robertson reflected this same concern over the relationship of tone to given emotions. The critic thought Robertson tortured "the sentiment to his tone, rather than adapt his tone to the sentiment."<sup>24</sup> Another critic considered the "noises" which issued from the breast of Edmund Kean "irksome," "painfully hoarse," and "almost inarticulate," but granted the fact that, since there were "feelings and language to which guttural notes, sepulchral sounds, even broken, harsh accents," were appropriate, he excelled in this "oratorical department of his profession."<sup>25</sup> Such a notion may also have originated in Sheridan's treatment of emotion. It was, after all, Sheridan who thought that, when the force of the emotion was extreme, words gave place to inarticulate sounds in rage, shrieks, sighs, and groans.<sup>26</sup> The Boston critic, however, would not concede that Kean's "tones" were deserving of praise, for he could not "believe that the hysterical laugh, or cry," (the critic could not decide which but thought it more like "barking" than either) was well suited to the expression of passion.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup>New York Mirror, January 29, 1825, p. 215.

<sup>24</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 207.

<sup>25</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Chinoy, Actors on Acting, p. 301.

<sup>26</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, p. 132.

<sup>27</sup>New England Galaxy, February 11, 1821, n.p.

Sometimes, of course, the critic did not confine himself to describing the emotional portrayal of the actor in terms of one element or the other, but considered both together as the "means" by which the actor appealed to the feelings of the audience. A Philadelphia critic dealing with both vocal and physical aspects of Kean's display of emotion had occasion to remark that "his limbs have no repose or steadiness in scenes of agitated feeling; his hands are kept in unremitting and the most rapid convulsive movement; seeking . . . a resting place in some part of his upper dress, and occasionally pressed together on the crown of his head."<sup>28</sup> In short, he thought the physical means used by Kean were ineffective. This critic went on to point out that such "quick and irregular," or such "vehement and perturbed," gestures are not always suited to the use he made of them. He also observed that "there is a discipline and temperament even for disorder, whether of action or utterance, on the stage."<sup>29</sup> His ultimate position was that there were situations in which the tragedian's gesticulation could be misplaced and detrimental to his emotional portrayal. The critic wrote:

It has been emphatically said that dignity has no arms, especially where there is great force of expression in the eyes and other features. Dejection, lowly grief, profound reflection, tender sentiment, contempt, solemn or malicious menace, hauteur, rising passion of whatever nature, require but a look, a motion of the head.

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<sup>28</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Chimoy, Actors on Acting, p. 302.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.



The energetic use of the limbs spoils the true and effectual expression.<sup>30</sup>

When he came to the discussion of Kean's use of voice in the highly emotional scenes, the critic made note of the fact that this actor, in attempting to express intense rage or horror, became almost inarticulate. By this overstraining of the voice, the critic thought Kean rendered himself "contemptible," as do all those whose physical powers fail at the height of "infuriate passion." The vocal insufficiency which prevented Kean from reaching the desired peak of his emotional conception led him, in the reviewer's estimation, to attempt to compensate through more violent actions and thus transgress even further the boundaries of propriety.<sup>31</sup>

George Henry Lewes, who had seen Kean act in 1832, sums up very well the relation between the vocal and physical means for depicting emotion as employed by Kean. Lewes thought that, even after gout "made it difficult for him to display his accustomed grace, when a drunken hoarseness had ruined his once matchless voice, such was the irresistible pathos--manly, not fearful, which vibrated in his tones and expressed itself in look and gestures, that old men leaned their heads upon their arms and fairly sobbed."<sup>32</sup> Lewes went on to say that Kean had little power of elocution except when sustained by a strong emotion. It was Lewes who gave Kean the tag of "master of the subsiding emotion," although this feature of Kean's acting had been noted by others. He said, ". . . in watching Kean's quivering muscles and altered tones you felt the subsidence of passion.

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Lewes, Actors and the Art of Acting, p. 16.



The voice might be calm, but there were vanishing traces of recent agitation."<sup>33</sup>

The theatrical critic, in addition to following the elocutionist's lead in identifying the physical and vocal means, as they were used, either separately or in combination with each other, to achieve emotional expression, further insisted that the actor exercise care in choosing the most appropriate vocal and physical patterns by which to make his emotional appeal. The critic, reviewing Forrest's version of the dream sequence in Richard III, gave the actor unstinted praise for his use of voice, facial expression, and gesture in evoking the emotional impact of the scene. He described it as follows:

The horror inspired by his dream caused him to drop prostrate on his face. The expression on his countenance, as the vision seems gradually to be dispelled, and with a half bewildered look he utters, "Soft, I did but dream," the visible workings of his conscience, his ghastly look and trembling limbs, in the succeeding part of the soliloquy, and the startled, terrified manner in which he exclaims, "Who's there?" when Ratcliffe suddenly enters, all were executed with such ability and genius as raised the admiration of the audience to the highest pitch.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of this concern for the appropriateness of the "means" used to produce emotion, the critic of the period was quick to censure the actor whose physical and vocal patterns failed to produce the emotion intended. One critic, for example, thought Conway's attempt to suggest strong emotion by flinging back his head and shoulders, and bending his knees as if to bring himself on a level with those around him did not achieve its purpose.<sup>35</sup> Another instance of the critic's displeasure

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>34</sup>Critic, November 15, 1828, p. 47.

<sup>35</sup>New York Mirror, April 17, 1824, p. 303.

over an actor's failure to employ the proper means for his emotional effects is to be found in a Galaxy criticism of the actor Maywood. In this case, it was felt that the actor "did not give himself time to embody in his look, gesture, or speech, the passion which he intended to express."<sup>36</sup> The critic of the period tended to think of emotion in terms of distinct categories, each with its appropriate "signs." The extent to which this tendency was carried out in actual reviews was illustrated by one critic who identified "five grades of feeling" from the appropriate means a Miss Clifton used to portray them.<sup>37</sup> From such criticisms we may infer that the theatrical critic tended to think of emotional portrayal in much the same way as the elocutionist did; that is, in terms of suiting the proper tone, look, or gesture to the particular emotion.

The criticisms examined thus far in this consideration of emotional expression may invite the belief that the critics and audience of the period were interested in emotion for emotion's sake. It may appear, also, that their insistence upon the proper vocal and physical means of demonstrating emotion is proof of an admiration for a type of acting which is commonly classified as bombastic, or even ranting. It is true that a little rant or bombast was not looked upon with entire disfavor at this time. Indeed, some felt there were moments in which it was highly proper. A case in point can be found in a critic's remark concerning Charles Kean's acting style. The critic thought that, because

<sup>36</sup>New England Galaxy, February 26, 1819, n.p.

<sup>37</sup>New York Mirror, September 9, 1837, p. 88.

Kean was normally a "quiet" actor, his sudden violent scenes showed the better by contrast. Furthermore, Kean was praised because he avoided ranting when he could do so without violating the intention of the text.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, "tearing a passion to tatters," although it might be considered perfectly adapted to some passages, if carried too far, was sure to be censured by the critic. Mr. Pritchard, for instance, was criticized, not for ranting, but for ranting unnecessarily, in the role of Hotspur, and for indulging in "too much passion, too much heat," and for missing the "coolness of deliberate villainy" in another role.<sup>39</sup> Forrest was not exempt from this sort of criticism. One critic maintained that he betrayed "more emotion than comports with consistency of Othello's character."<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Wallstein was berated in like manner by a critic who thought she overacted in Roméo and Juliet. In his words, she suggested "howlings at an Irish wake, rather than the grief of an affectionate nurse."<sup>41</sup> It appears, then, the period produced actors who, many times, "o'erstepped the modesty of nature" when playing intense emotional scenes. It also appears probable, however, there were some actors who could handle extreme or violent passions, and handle them powerfully, without bringing down such epithets as bombastic and ranting. The critic of the American Monthly, for example, thought Forrest could powerfully delineate the finest characters of Shakespeare, because he

<sup>38</sup>New York Mirror, September 10, 1831, p. 78.

<sup>39</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], November, 1817, pp. 60-61.

<sup>40</sup>New York Mirror, May 3, 1828, p. 339.

<sup>41</sup>New York Mirror, August 28, 1824, p. 39.

could give "full effect to the passion to be expressed," and at the same time do so with the necessary dignity and propriety.<sup>42</sup>

From the amount of attention which the critic bestowed on the actor's portrayal of emotion, and his frequent analysis of the manner in which the actor used his voice and body for this purpose, it would appear that a performer's ability to affect the feelings of an audience became a major criterion--perhaps even the major criterion for judging the excellence of acting. Certainly both critic and elocutionist considered this ability not only important, but as absolutely necessary. In fact, an idea prevalent at the time was that there was a "language of emotions and passions, as well as of ideas."<sup>43</sup> Enfield, a proponent of this viewpoint, went on to say that no one could be a good speaker until he was able to add to "distinct articulation, a good command of voice, and just emphasis, the various expressions of emotion and passion."<sup>44</sup> Significantly, he was not alone in this belief. Murray, and many of the other elocutionists, believed that the public speaker's object was twofold: "not merely to lay open the ideas, but also the different feelings which they excite in him who utters them. . . ."<sup>45</sup> Porter, in turn, noted the necessity for the speaker to develop his ability to play upon the emotions of his audience.

Be it remembered, that all directions as to the management of the voice, must be regarded as subsidiary to the expression of feeling, or they are worse than useless. "Emotion

<sup>42</sup>American Monthly Magazine, January 1, 1834, n.p.

<sup>43</sup>Enfield, The Speaker, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Murray, The English Reader, p. 11.

is the thing. One flash of passion on the cheek, one beam of feeling from the eye, one thrilling note of sensibility from the tongue,--have a thousand times more value than exemplification of mere rules, where feeling is absent."<sup>46</sup>

Porter even went so far as to say, "The parts of external oratory, as voice, look, and gesture, are only instruments by which the soul acts;--when the inspiration of the soul is absent, these instruments cannot produce eloquence."<sup>47</sup>

Just as the elocutionist emphasized the importance of emotional expression in the oral arts, the theatrical critic gave this element prime importance in the histrionic art. Critic "E" of the American Monthly went so far as to imply that the actor might be forgiven for other inadequacies if he managed to rise to great emotional heights in the climactic scenes.<sup>48</sup> The effect which emotional portrayal had upon an audience was felt to be so powerful that it was credited with beneficial results beyond the mere stimulation of the moment. It was believed emotional portrayal, when powerful enough in its appeal and directed to ends which were salutary, could provide "lessons" for the young to follow. The Galaxy critic thought Cooper provided such an example in his portrayal of Virginius, where he exhibited "a specimen of the terribly sublime" in the strangling of Appius. "His 'face was a book,'" the critic thought, "wherein one might read thoughts too awful for

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<sup>46</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 18.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>48</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], July, 1817, p. 209.

utterance—it was a picture which a painter might study who would catch the features in that dreadful moment when the Almighty destroys the free agency of man, to make him the innocent and unconscious instrument of vengeance and retribution."<sup>49</sup> An even stronger indication of this tendency to equate great emotional portrayal with moral lessons can be found in an 1825 issue of the New York Mirror. On this occasion the critic wrote: "It is on the stage that . . . the ungovernable passions of man are represented in their highest import, and in their most dreadful consequences, as a lesson to the rising youth of our country."<sup>50</sup> In the final analysis, powerful emotion coupled with a moral purpose must have made an irresistible appeal to the playgoer of the period. One Boston critic summed up the matter in a reference to Mrs. Henry's performance of Monimia: ". . . if anything could persuade us to be present at a repetition of the Orphan, it would be a desire to experience once more the emotions excited by her delineation of truth and innocence in distress."<sup>51</sup>

But the importance which the theatrical critic attached to the factor of emotion in the actor's art is shown in still other ways. In this respect, it was deemed important by virtue of the extent to which it could move the audience when employed properly by a skilled actor. It could, therefore, serve as a vital measure of the actor's proficiency in his art. One of the most vivid descriptions of the power this kind

<sup>49</sup>New England Galaxy, December 8, 1820, p. 34.

<sup>50</sup>New York Mirror, October 15, 1825, p. 93.

<sup>51</sup>New England Galaxy, March 26, 1824, n.p.



of emotional portrayal could wield is to be found in the Mirror review of Damon and Pythias which contended that Cooper "out-Coopered Cooper."<sup>52</sup> The critic, describing the effect of Cooper's emotional portrayal, observed the audience was "suspended in breathless expectation" like the anxious spectators at Syracuse. He singled out the execution scene for special attention. He described the manner in which Damon entered exhausted and fell senseless at the foot of the scaffold, and how Pythias darted from the platform to restore his friend to consciousness, only to have him faint again. The critic noted that, while the effect was "electric," it was surpassed when the disguised Dionysius asked, "Where is Damon?" At this point, we are told, Damon vaulted "like lightning upon the scaffold, [presumably from the position of a faint] and in an attitude that might have awed the gods," exclaimed, "'Here, upon my throne!'" The critic thought language inadequate to describe the various passions expressed at this moment: "conscious magnanimity,--detestation of the tyrant--affection for his friend--contempt of death--triumph of virtue--all these seemed to strive together for mastery in the expressive countenance of Cooper."<sup>53</sup> The fact that the critic could isolate and identify the various emotions pictured on Cooper's face bears out the contention they were expressed through the more or less conventionalized patterns of physical expression of the kind which Burgh had described, and which had come to be associated with them in the actor's and orator's delivery.

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<sup>52</sup>New York Mirror, August 2, 1823, pp. 54-55.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

To a certain extent, the actor's ability to affect an audience became a basis for comparing one actor with another. It was patently so in the case of one New York critic who, in writing of the elder Booth's portrayal of Sir Giles Overreach, said:

We have felt some exquisitely tender tone of Kean's voice go straight to the heart--we have wept over the pathos of Conway, and warmly admired the classic elegance of his style, and the nobleness of his princely figure--and we have started at the impressive vehemence of Cooper's anger--but we solemnly declare, that no acting ever made an impression on us--more completely wrought up our feelings, and made our blood curdle with horror, than the Sir Giles Overreach of Mr. Booth.<sup>54</sup>

The critic went on to list the means by which Booth secured these emotional effects: "a clear unclouded forehead,--eyebrows regularly arched--a Grecian nose, lips well formed and calculated to express the feelings--large dark eyes . . . present a countenance formed to display the most delicate shades of passion."<sup>55</sup>

The manner in which actors portrayed emotion, or their skill in portraying certain types of emotion also became involved in this type of comparison. Speaking of Barry and Woodhull, a reviewer characterized the latter as "like a flint" which "must be struck sharply before he emits a spark," and the former as like a rocket, "off in a blaze at the slightest touch."<sup>56</sup> Another critic drew the difference between Charles Kemble and his daughter, Fanny, who often appeared with him, as one involving the kind of emotion which each best portrayed. Charles Kemble

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., April 3, 1824, p. 286.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., July 18, 1829, p. 13.

was said to be "unequalled in the delineations of passions and feelings, as they arise in the breast of a gentleman, tempered by a sense of honor. . . ."57 Kemble's daughter was thought to be "the first actress of the English world in pathetic tragedy and sentimental comedy."58 The same critic comparing Forrest, Placide, and Kemble used their manner of portraying emotion as the factor determining their differences: Forrest was said to be "an actor of passion undisguised, and unchecked by the artificialities and restraints of civilization--of the sudden sympathies, and fierce outbursts of anger in the savage," and as great as Kemble in the opposite line; whereas Placide was able to encompass roles requiring delineation of different kinds of emotion.59

In the period from 1815 to 1840 the theatrical critic in America gave much of his attention to the manner in which the actor portrayed emotion. Like the elocutionist, the critic analyzed the performer's treatment of emotion in terms of what he did with his voice and body. In this, he appeared to believe, as the elocutionist did, that tones, even inarticulate or animal-like ones, could at times become a sign of emotion and used to affect an audience accordingly. The critic also agreed with the elocutionist that various bodily attitudes, gestures, and facial expressions were associated with the various emotions, and the critic appeared, at any rate, to be able to "read" the

57American Monthly Magazine, March 1, 1833, p. 64.

58Ibid.

59Ibid.

various emotions through the tones, looks and gestures the actor associated with them. Finally the critic, like the elocutionist, placed great importance on an actor's ability to affect the feelings of an audience and, at times, used it as a basis for comparing one actor with another.

## CHAPTER VI

### FIDELITY TO NATURE IN AMERICAN ACTING

"Those rules of old discovered, not devised,  
Are nature still, but nature methodized." --Pope

One important criterion which the theatrical critic used to judge the actor on the American stage during the years 1815-1840, was the degree to which the performer achieved a "fidelity to nature." Inasmuch as the critic gave considerable attention to this element of acting technique, it is necessary to treat the problem of "nature" along with pronunciation, voice, bodily action, and emotion, and to attempt to analyze it in terms of the prevailing patterns of communication to which this study is devoted. In a sense, this particular factor of the actor's technique may be thought of as the culmination of all the other factor, the one quality to which all the other elements contributed. In the discussion of emotion, we found that the factors of vocal and bodily techniques were considered, to some extent, as the means through which the actor made his emotional appeal. In like manner, the vocal and physical elements with the added factor of emotion were recognized as the "means" by which the actor achieved a "fidelity to nature." The analysis of the role of "nature" is complicated by the interrelationship of all these factors.

The problem of attempting to determine what the actor did to win for himself the accolade of "natural" is one which presents peculiar difficulties. From the descriptions of the acting examined thus far, it is obvious that, if such acting were indeed considered "natural," then the term "natural acting" bore a far different significance from that which we give it today. Students of the theatre are aware, however, that the acting of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was called "natural," a fact which has been one source of the controversy over acting styles of great players of the past. Darlington, in his study of the Actor and His Audience, focuses attention on the problem and demonstrates the necessity for attempting to determine what "natural" acting was like in a given period. He makes reference to the fact that practically all accounts of Garrick's acting stress his naturalness, but these records of his performances also raise the question of what the term meant to those who employed it thus. Certainly it does not refer to the sort of "naturalness" the modern actor cultivates. Darlington concluded that Garrick's acting would probably be considered "dreadfully theatrical" by present-day standards.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Sarah Siddons, a follower of the so-called "classic" school of the Kembles, who has been described as an actress of great "correctitude and contrivance," considered herself a "creature of impulse" on the stage. It must be remembered, also, that while Kean's style was said to depend on impulse and inspiration, he insisted all his movements were "precisely calculated

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<sup>1</sup>W. A. Darlington, The Actor and His Audience (London, 1949), p. 60.



beforehand."<sup>2</sup> Such seemingly wide discrepancies make it obvious that an attempt must be made to define what was meant by the terms, "nature," "fidelity to nature," or "following nature," as employed in America during the period surveyed in this study.

In arriving at this definition, and in determining the constituents of, "natural acting," it is necessary to look, first at the term as it was employed by the elocutionists to describe the standard patterns prevailing in the communicative arts. It will then be possible to look for reflections of this point of view in the theatrical criticisms. Having established the similarity of outlook by the critic and elocutionist, we shall turn to the problem of ascertaining how pronunciation, voice, bodily action, and emotion contributed to the actor's achievement of a natural effect in his acting. Finally, it will be necessary to examine the theatrical criticism which compares and contrasts "natural" with "artificial" acting in order to understand the terms as they were used in this period.

Since the time of Aristotle it has been taken for granted that naturalness in speech, whether it is that of the orator, oral reader, or actor, was a virtue. While naturalness has been held up as a criterion by which to judge the excellence of these performers, the "implications of this assumption are seldom examined critically."<sup>3</sup> The further observation might be added that the concept of naturalness is all too often considered apart from its significance in a given period. So far as his

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>3</sup>W. M. Parrish, "The Concept of 'Naturalness,'" QJS, XXXVII (December, 1951), 448.

acting is concerned, once an actor has been called "natural" the label remains, often even in periods when the concept is something quite different from that of its earlier usage. Succeeding generations have looked back to Garrick and other great "natural" actors without stopping to consider that the factors which caused the actor to receive this designation may have little reference to the elements of acting which would be included under that label today.

In attempting to determine what naturalness in delivery actually meant in the period under review, the writings of the elocutionists will serve as a guide. The purpose of the elocutionists was to observe and record "certain phenomena of voice, body, and language," and from these observations to devise principles which would guide the public speaker, reader, or actor in achieving a natural delivery. The elocutionist conceived of man as controlled by natural law, and he could therefore confidently claim that the rules or precepts which he discovered were "nature still, but nature methodized." In general, the phrase "follow nature" meant applying rules which were conceived to be universal laws.<sup>4</sup> It is not necessary here to enter the controversy as to whether the elocutionists of this period were, in reality, "mechanists" or "naturalists." By the same token, it is not essential that they be divided into two schools, one advocating a mechanical application of rules, and the other recommending nature as a guide to good delivery. Suffice it to say, they all conceived of naturalness in oral delivery as a mark of excellence. This held true regardless of whether the preference was for the

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<sup>4</sup>Haberman, in History of Speech Education, pp. 109-110.

application of rules to achieve a "natural" effect, or for the imitation of real-life models. Vandraegen's study of the elocutionists sheds a good deal of light on the subject of naturalness as we are trying to define it here. He views the two so-called "schools" of elocutionists as representative of "two manifestations of the human spirit in the eighteenth century": the first, or neoclassical, was devoted to the expression of what was typical or customary in nature and human experience, based on patterns of common acceptance, and on the following of proved models; and a second, or "romantic," was dedicated to "performing spontaneously and sincerely out of the fullness and force of heartfelt emotion, expressing what was unique or personal in human nature and human experience."<sup>5</sup> The general position of the elocutionist in this period, then, would appear to be that he considered naturalness a virtue in delivery, and that the way to obtain it was by following certain universal rules or laws which would give him the appearance of naturalness. While some elocutionists advocated a more "romantic" approach through a more direct and spontaneous imitation of nature, most of them, sooner or later, had recourse to rules which would refine the crude product of nature and give it grace.

The theatrical critic of the period considered here gave his assent to these views of the elocutionist. For instance, one critic, reviewing the acting of Hamblin and comparing him with Forrest and Booth, prefaced his remarks with some comments about acting in general. "Rules may and should guide the actor," he said, "but they cannot form

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<sup>5</sup>Daniel E. Vandraegen, "Thomas Sheridan and the Natural School," SM, XX (1953), 58.

him. His principal study should be Nature's broad infallible volume, by which test he should examine every habit, from which he should derive every precept; to which he should refer every suggestion."<sup>6</sup> Although this critic pays proper tribute to the god of nature, he nevertheless is aware of the means the actor employed to achieve naturalness. With respect to these means, the critic thought Hamblin the equal of Forrest in grace of movement, and superior to Booth. In terms of energetic emotional portrayal, however, Hamblin was said to be inferior to both Booth and Forrest. These comparisons suggest the critic was thinking of the actor's ability to appear natural, as the elocutionist generally did, through the proper employment of the physical and emotional means at his command. He found, for instance, Hamblin's defects consisted of a lack of expression in his eyes which sent forth "no lightning emanations from the soul, and an "inflexibility of countenance" which did not allow emotions to be displayed in the lines of his face. But among his good points, the critic noted that his "passion is natural, gestures easy and dignified except in the whirlwind of passion when he is apt to fling his arms about wildly; his attitudes appropriate and graceful except that he sometimes starts into them too vehemently."<sup>7</sup> It may be the label "natural" was assigned to that which appeared to have a natural emotional effect, or which was done with a measure of ease that made it seem natural. One critic, speaking of a Mr. Williams said,

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<sup>6</sup>Critic, April 18, 1828, p. 386.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

When an actor can summon the tear fresh from the heart, bid it glisten in your eye a moment, and then chase it away by the radiant sunshine of a smile, we think him a master of his profession--we think he studies nature, and not art--and these are the criterions by which we judge of histrionic excellence.<sup>8</sup>

Another critic took into consideration the elocutionary precepts of ease and smoothness and equated these with naturalness, noting how many "mistake what is new for what is beautiful, and overlook the most perfect exhibition of art because its very perfection prevents the art from being seen."<sup>9</sup> The old precept of ars est celare artem, whether in its Latin original or in English translation, was quoted often by both critic and elocutionist. John Bernard, who had spent some years as an actor in the United States, wrote what is probably the best working definition of nature from the actor's point of view. He said:

Perfection of the actor's skill is not . . . to make Art appear Nature; it is something more,--it is to make Nature appear Nature. It is to cause the nature which burns in his own bosom, to correspond with that in the spectator's, by raising that latter up to the level of his own high excitement, and to open to the general sympathies of a crowd the confined and peculiar feelings of the poet.<sup>10</sup>

Turning now from the general agreement which exists between the viewpoints of the elocutionist and those of the theatrical critics of the period, let us inquire into the connection between the problem of naturalness and the criteria previously established by this study. It is not to be expected, of course, that there will be criticisms which are devoted to the "naturalness" or "unnaturalness" of an actor's

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<sup>8</sup>New York Mirror, January 15, 1825, p. 199.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1831, p. 115.

<sup>10</sup>John Bernard, Retrospections of the Stage (2 vols.; London, 1830), I, 136.



pronunciations of words. There are, however, some factors which call for a brief consideration of naturalness in relation to the pronunciations of words. Cockin, in his Art of Delivering Written Language, drew the difference between two kinds of arts: those which imitated nature, and those which improved nature. Such arts as painting and sculpture, he thought, belonged to the former, while the art of speaking came under the latter. Cockin was of the opinion that an artist was always justified in "heightening one characteristic of form" if he did not exaggerate it. An actor might heighten, for instance, the natural reaction to a given emotion if he did not distort it. He took the position that the heightening of natural characteristics was to be approved in every art, and that it served to justify an actor who chose to make an unusual delay on an unaccented syllable in theatrical declamation.<sup>11</sup> This pronouncing of words with undue attention to normally unstressed syllables may have had some effect on the rhythm of the actor's speaking, and may have called down such objections as that of one critic to the "ti-tum-ti mode of reading which most actors are so fond of."<sup>12</sup> At any rate, a Philadelphia critic thought Kean's manner of inserting pauses between the syllables of words made for "fanciful reading" which created a "wild havoc of their [the poet's] lines," rather than the natural effects which this actor was said to provide.<sup>13</sup> In her study of the influence of the elocutionists on pronunciation, Harder pointed

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<sup>11</sup>William Cockin, The Art of Delivering Written Language (London, 1775), p. 110.

<sup>12</sup>New York Mirror, August 26, 1826, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Chincy Actors on Acting, p. 303.



out that pronunciations probably varied: that during passages of natural conversation pronunciations conformed very much to that which was customarily used by the audience; but in the more "sonorous lines of poetry," pronunciation must have become more "artificial" as the actor launched forth into a more formal declamatory style.<sup>14</sup> It is probable that the manner in which the actor pronounced his words may have had some bearing on judgments regarding the actor's naturalness, or the lack of it, but not much attention was given to it by the critics.

Both critic and elocutionist, however, gave a great deal of attention to the relationship between the factor of voice and the matter of naturalness. Some elocutionists recommended the patterns of conversational speech as the normal pattern for the public speaker to follow.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the speaker was generally advised to heighten and emphasize these patterns of conversational speech in order to give the appearance of naturalness from the platform. Enfield, for instance said that to "follow Nature is the fundamental law of Oratory, without a regard to which, all other rules, will only produce affected declamation, not just elocution." Nevertheless, he was careful to point out that it was necessary to "discover and correct those tones and habits of speaking which are gross deviations from nature" and which spoil the "propriety and grace of utterance."<sup>16</sup> Caleb Bingham subscribed

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<sup>14</sup>Harder, "Influence of the Teaching of Elocution," p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, pp. 19-20; see also Porter Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 46.

<sup>16</sup>Enfield, The Speaker, p. 6.

to the same general vocal precept in his Columbian Orator when he wrote that "it is the orator's business to follow nature and endeavor that the tone of voice appear natural and unaffected."<sup>17</sup>

It is important to note the word "appear" occurs over and over in the works of the elocutionists, and it is evident that what they sought in all their prescriptions for naturalness was the appearance of naturalness in the performer's delivery. But what appeared to be natural in the acting of the period may have been only what was conventional. Murdoch, for example, noted, although every new star to emerge on the stage was "supposed to have received a special revelation from Nature," every actor, even if he had a natural voice to begin with, felt it must "be permeated with the flavor of the stage," which he acquired by copying the "manners of voice in vogue."<sup>18</sup> This was apparently not true of Forrest when he made his debut on the New York stage. The critic, on that occasion, thought he perceived in the young man "something more than a mere student of elocution, servilely copying some favourite star of the day. . . ."<sup>19</sup> "It is evident," the critic went on, "that he looks to nature for his models, and to his own genius for instruction. . . ."<sup>20</sup> The critic further reported that Forrest aimed "at a proper medium between the familiar and declamatory tone," but even so it was felt he needed "polish." Finally, Forrest was urged

<sup>17</sup>Caleb Bingham, The Columbian Orator (5th Troy ed.; Troy, 1811), p. 14.

<sup>18</sup>Murdoch, The Stage, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup>New York Mirror, July 1, 1826, p. 391.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

to perservere in his present plan, for almost anything was preferable to the "drawling cant of the old school."<sup>21</sup> Such a criticism suggests that there may have been a movement in the direction of a more conversational mode of speaking as the elocutionists had recommended. Nevertheless, it was felt that a completely conversational manner was not altogether in keeping with the rank, dignity, position, or situation of some characters. A Boston critic, for example, considered Kean's colloquial mode of speaking was not suited to the dignity of the characters he portrayed.<sup>22</sup> But the critic did record his admiration for Kean's "unconstrained air and manner," however, and stated his hope that the actor's example would "banish from the stage the miserable formality which has so long usurped it."<sup>23</sup> It appears the actor-elocutionist, George Vandenhoff, also detected some measure of the desired naturalness in the acting of Kean. He described it by saying,

He hurried you on through a catalogue of Antonio's atrocities and unproved injuries to him, enforcing them with a strong accentuation, and a high pitch of voice; and when he had reached the climax, he came down by a sudden transition to a gentle suffering tone of simple representation of his oppressor's manifest unreasons and injustice, in the words: "I am a Jew!" and the effect was instantaneous.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of all the commendation of the natural manner in speaking, it is clear that speaking which departed too far from the declamatory, or ranting, styles was not yet universally acceptable. One example of this reservation can be found in a New York critic's comment

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>New England Galaxy, February 23, 1821, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Darlington, Actor and His Audience, pp. 111-112.

on Charles Kean's Hamlet. It noted there was "no noisy ranting--no trick--no aiming at effect--everything was easy, chaste, and natural. This we consider the highest praise."<sup>25</sup> The fact the critic had to make clear that the substitution of a natural, easy manner of speaking for ranting and calculated effects was a matter for praise makes its own statement of the degree to which a natural manner of speaking was accepted. Indeed, it may well have been that such characteristics as "ease," "chasteness," and "quietness," in an actor's speaking style were not always thought of as the "natural" manner. The elder Booth, in one instance was lauded for his ability to depict a scene with "reality" on the basis of a performance that was far from "chaste" or "quiet." The critic reported:

The tone of diabolical energy which in the last act pervades every speech and action of Sir Giles, and his appalling bursts of passion which swell into raving delirium, and leave him at length powerless and senseless, were all depicted by Mr. Booth in a manner which almost drove from our minds the idea of acting, and made the scene appear like reality.<sup>26</sup>

In Boston, the Galaxy critic emphasized the characteristics of Cooper's natural manner of speaking by describing, first of all, what he considered to be an unnatural manner of speaking. He began by asking if it was "nature to speak after the fashionable style" which he described as one "with inflated cheeks, muscles distorted from their ordinary movements; and words measured out like the notes of music, in quick or common time, as the case may be, and the divisions marked by a 'windy

<sup>25</sup>New York Mirror, September 25, 1830, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., November 11, 1826, p. 127.

suspuration of forced breath' loud enough to be heard in the remotest corner or crack of the theatre."<sup>27</sup> This, he pointed out, was not the manner in which Cooper spoke; for his was a "just, energetic, and easy elocution" which would always "render him a favourite with those who are pleased with the representations of nature and the language of the soul."<sup>28</sup> Such criticisms as these seem to point to the fact that the actor of the time employed the various factors of his voice to produce two styles of speaking: first, a declamatory style, at times, bordering on rant and bombast; second, a more colloquial or familiar style. The former was an "elevated" or "heightened" sort of speaking style which was considered proper to the dignity of the character, the style of the language, or the situation. The latter was employed in passages which did not demand the exhibition of fiery passion or elevated sentiment. Some actors, such as Edmund Kean, must have made rapid transitions from one to the other. So far as the label of naturalness is concerned, both these styles appeared to be considered natural. In some cases, the determining factor seemed to be whether the manner of speaking suited the character, his position, and his situation.

Bodily action, too, came in for its share of consideration in the process of establishing whether the actor appeared natural in the delineation of character. Here again the elocutionist's standards were, in all likelihood, those commonly accepted by the critics and performers of the time. Walker thought that gesture was the "language of nature"

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<sup>27</sup>New England Galaxy, December 4, 1818, n.p.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.



and, as such, made "its way to the heart, without the utterance of a sound."<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, he made it clear that "the common feelings of nature, with the signs that express them undergo a kind of modification," and must not be allowed to come from chance, or to be based on inspiration.<sup>30</sup> His directions for achieving natural and suitable action were as follows:

When anything sublime, lofty, or heavenly is expressed, the eye and the right hand may be very properly elevated; and when anything low, inferiour, or grovelling is referred to, the eye and hand may be directed downwards: when anything distant or extensive is mentioned, the hand may naturally describe the distance or extent.<sup>31</sup>

These gestures are, obviously, those which had been conventional or customary with speakers for a long time. Like Walker's, Porter's rules for gesture were based solidly in custom, although he thought "the power of action" consisted wholly in its correspondence with thought and emotion, a correspondence which had its roots in either nature or custom.<sup>32</sup> Some of his rules, such as that restricting the use of the left hand in gesturing, recalled Quintilian; others involved such conventional items as: "The hand, raised and inverted, repels . . . placed on the mouth, silence; on the head, pain; on the breast, affection."<sup>33</sup> When an actor employed these conventionalized gestures gracefully and easily, it is probable that he was given the stamp of "natural" by critic and spectators of the day. A case in point is a

<sup>29</sup>Walker, Elements of Elocution, p. 301.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 303-304.

<sup>32</sup>Porter, Analysis of Rhetorical Delivery, p. 146.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 149-150.



review of Vandenhoff's playing of Richelieu in New York in 1840. The critic listed among his many "natural" qualities "the exquisite ease with which he gave the necessary direction to those around him, the well-affected stoop, the inquisitive side-glance, and the indomitable pride and unrelenting sternness of purpose which were stamped on his every feature." In fact, the critic thought these bodily actions (which bear a marked similarity to wholly conventional ones) demonstrated "a greater variety of traits and exquisite adaptations to nature, and all her laws, than anything almost that ever was witnessed on the American stage."<sup>34</sup> In somewhat similar fashion a critic said of Fanny Kemble that "it is with her face that she acts the most." While such a statement might lead us to think that her acting was characterized by a kind of grimacing, it may be well to note the critic went on to comment that "her attitudes were faultless. . . . her confessions, sweetly reluctant, the earnestness especially, . . . made the scene like nature."<sup>35</sup> But, while factors of attitude, gesticulation, and facial expression could be employed in a more or less conventional manner and still be thought natural, it was also true that the actor might carry this tendency too far and leave himself open to the censure of the critic. The Galaxy critic, although commending Booth for his naturalness felt it necessary to point out some "unnatural" elements in his action, such as "too much muscular exertion--something more than natural--in the business immediately following the dream [in Richard

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<sup>34</sup>New York Mirror, January 18, 1840, p. 238.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., September 29, 1832, p. 102.

III].<sup>36</sup> The reviewer considered "such extravagant expression of fear out of place in a serious representation."<sup>37</sup> He also reported that Booth was unnatural in his playing of Richard's death scene, "for he lay down as carefully as if he were Lord Grizzle rather than Richard and wanted only the night-cap and snuff-box to complete the parallel."<sup>38</sup>

Another facet of the concept of naturalness was revealed by a correspondent for the New York Mirror.<sup>39</sup> He wrote that he was pleased with Miss Barnes's playing because she was always engaged in the business of the scene--"no prying curiosity to observe effects of her acting on the audience--no unnecessary adjusting of her dress--no whispering to those on stage."<sup>39</sup> The writer hoped that "her strict adherence to character [would] be adopted by several performers of both sexes."<sup>40</sup> From this comment, we may infer that actors of the period frequently "dropped out of character" when not speaking, and filled in their interims of silence with wholly extraneous and unnatural movements. It is no wonder, then, that an actor who was constantly engaged in maintaining his character, even though in doing so he may have been employing more or less conventionalized movements, would be thought natural.

From the reviews examined in regard to naturalness in the employment of bodily action, and from the seeming similarity of the standards of the critics and the elocutionists, it would appear during

<sup>36</sup>New England Galaxy, May 10, 1822, n.p.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>New York Mirror, April 26, 1834, p. 338.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

this period several conditions warranted the use of the term "natural." An actor would be labeled as "natural" if he employed attitudes, postures, facial expressions, and all the other facets of bodily action with ease and grace. Furthermore, the designation of natural might be given for using these elements with a sense of their appropriateness to the character portrayed, to the situation depicted, and to the kind of language the actor was given to speak.

In addition to their agreement that such elements as voice and bodily action be natural, both critic and elocutionist agreed that a performer's expression of emotion should also show a fidelity to nature. Burgh, whose Art of Speaking catalogued the "principal passions, humors, sentiments, and intentions," and described the manner in which he thought nature expressed them, believed that "nature had given to every emotion its outward expression."<sup>41</sup> Like the other elocutionists, and like most of the theatrical critics of the period, he felt that "nature unassisted" was not the complete answer but that, in the final analysis, art was "but nature improved upon and refined."<sup>42</sup> Walker also thought that "our natural feelings are not always commanded; and, when they are, stand in need of the regulation and embellishments of art."<sup>43</sup> "It is the business, therefore," he said, "of every reader and speaker in public, to acquire such tones and gestures as nature gives to the passions; that he may be able to produce the semblance of them when he is

<sup>41</sup>Burgh, Art of Speaking, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>43</sup>Walker, Elements of Elocution, p. 310.

not actually impassioned."<sup>44</sup> Such a remark reflects the opinion of Sarah Siddons who had observed "that those who act mechanically are sure to be in some sort right; while we who trust to nature--if we do not happen to be in the humour . . .--are as dull as anything can be imagined, because we cannot feign."<sup>45</sup> Enfield, although he did not ignore a need for rules, recommended the performer learn "to observe the various ways by which nature expresses the several perceptions, emotions and passions of the human mind, and to distinguish these from the mere effects of arbitrary custom or false taste."<sup>46</sup> Murdoch, in considering the problem of how the actor was to demonstrate emotions that were natural, observed that the actor frequently erred because, since he was not tearing a passion to tatters, he imagined he was following nature.<sup>47</sup> These views of the elocutionists regarding the natural portrayal of emotion were widely reflected in the theatrical criticism of the time. The Mirror critic, commenting on a Conway performance, said:

He modulates his voice to the soft sweetness necessary for the delineation of the far-famed passion--and his manner breathes all the languid luxury of the lover's mind. A thousand little actions whereby the abundance of feeling is expressed, are represented by this faithful imitator of nature--who by close attention seems to have observed all the peculiarities of passion, of the angry or pathetic --of emotion suppressed, or sweeping through the distracted mind without restraint.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Quoted from a letter written by Sarah Siddons, in Darlington, Actor and His Audience, p. 82.

<sup>46</sup>Enfield, The Speaker, pp. 5-6.

<sup>47</sup>Murdoch, The Stage, pp. 30-31.

<sup>48</sup>New York Mirror, September 17, 1825, p. 59.

A Boston critic also thought that Conway embodied passion in a powerful manner, a quality he acquired through "his intimate acquaintance with nature."<sup>49</sup> Another writer noted that Conway's delivery of Jaffier's oath in which he swears to revenge Belvidera's woes "was not declamation--it was not rant--it was the natural voice of passion."<sup>50</sup> Not all criticisms pointed to the natural manner in which the actor portrayed his role. Sometimes the critic noted the manner in which the actor portrayed emotion "unnaturally." An instance in point is a review concerning Wallack, whose great deficiency was thought to be a "want of feeling." Among the other defects noted in this review were such things as his obvious "efforts to keep his voice in proper modulation," his walking "by rule," and the fact that his excellence was solely "the excellence of mechanism, not the simple and powerful beauty of nature."<sup>51</sup> Wallack's playing of the comedy character of Dick Dashall did not disturb the reviewer, however, since it was "nature itself."<sup>52</sup> One of the most exact correspondences to be found between the elocutionary theories and theatrical criticisms is contained in the American Monthly's description of Cooper. The critic in question thought Cooper exhibited the "most just and striking personification of character--the most pathetic bursts of feeling."<sup>53</sup> He went on to sum up his impressions in the following manner:

<sup>49</sup>New England Galaxy, February 27, 1824, n.p.

<sup>50</sup>New York Mirror, October 29, 1825, p. 111.

<sup>51</sup>Critic, November 29, 1828, p. 80.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>American Monthly Magazine [Biglow], February, 1818, p. 239.

He has become more severe and chaste in his style of acting, and consequently more natural; he has acquired the power of exhibiting passion--strong feeling, by the deep agitation of his frame and the fine workings of his face, rather than by violent contortions, and furious gesticulation. His reading, too, though always good, is in better taste than it used to be: it is as rich as ever in the variety of tone and modulation, and is, at the same time, more simple and natural. His conception, moreover, manifests a deeper insight into character, with a finer discrimination of adventitious traits, and a more philosophical and profound knowledge of the passions than we have ever discerned in him before: indeed he is an admirable actor.<sup>54</sup>

These critical comments, fairly representative of the kind of theatrical criticism produced in the period, reflect the elocutionist's concern that the public speaker, reader, and actor portray emotion in a natural manner. The natural manner which they advocated was dependent not only upon an observation of how various emotions were indicated in real-life situations, but also upon a refinement which both elocutionist and critic considered necessary to give them the stamp of "art."

Before leaving the subject of nature, it would be well to examine some of the theatrical criticisms which compare and contrast natural and artificial acting. Up to this point we have attempted to examine the criticisms which have dealt with "natural" acting and to note the similarities between the critic's idea of "natural" delivery and the elocutionist's views concerning how the performer might appear to be natural. Obviously, both critic and elocutionist expected the performer to observe real life and model his use of voice, the action of his body, and the manner in which he expressed emotion upon such observation. Both, however, insisted that the public speaker, reader, or actor must go

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.



beyond the mere imitating of natural vocal patterns, natural bodily movements, and natural emotional expression, and bring the raw material of nature under the control of order and regularity. Furthermore, performers were expected to observe the principles of force and grace. Force was to be achieved by following nature, while grace was the result of the application of the rules of art.<sup>55</sup> The performer was to depend upon his observation and imitation of what he saw in nature for the power of his performance. On the other hand, he was to rely on art for that refinement, regularity, order, and imaginative quality which would enable him to play upon the "fancy" of his audience.<sup>56</sup>

When we examine theatrical criticisms written during the period and compare them with the various comments made by those who have studied the acting styles of the period, we find similar views of "nature" and "art." Henry Irving spoke of Kean as having restored nature to the English stage (as had others) which heretofore had been dominated by the "artificiality" of the Kembles. Irving was careful, however, to note that there was never "an actor who so thought out his part, who so closely studied with the inward eye of the artist the waves of emotion that might have agitated the minds of the beings whom he represented."<sup>57</sup> A Philadelphia critic thought that Kean obviously relied more "on mechanical resources, than on his general mental

<sup>55</sup>Sheridan, Lectures on Elocution, p. 154.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Henry Irving, English Actors (Oxford, 1886), p. 56.

preparation and powers, or his fervor of feeling. . . ."<sup>58</sup> The critic said that, in spite of the fact that Kean was called a natural player, his style of acting was "highly artificial and technical," "uniformly elaborate," with nothing left to the inspiration of the moment so that a second performance of a play was usually a facsimile of the first.<sup>59</sup> Leigh Hunt drew the distinction between the "natural" Kean and the "formal" Kemble when he noted that Kean's displacement of Kemble was "as sure a thing as Nature against Art, or tears against cheeks of stone."<sup>60</sup> Hunt thought, however, that Kemble had a good idea of tragedy, "namely that a certain elevation of treatment was due to it, that there was dignity and perception of something superior to common life, which should justly be regarded as one of its constituent portions."<sup>61</sup> He went on to mark the distinction between Kean, supposedly acting from impulse and inspiration, and Kemble, to whom "all was external and artificial." "Kemble," he said, "knew there was a difference between tragedy and common life, but did not know in what it consisted, except in manner, which he consequently carried to excess, losing sight of passion."<sup>62</sup> He professed, on the other hand, that Kean knew "the real thing which is the height of passion, manner following

<sup>58</sup>From the Philadelphia National Gazette, in Cole and Chincy, Actors on Acting, p. 301.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Leigh Hunt, as quoted in Cole and Chincy, Actors on Acting, p. 198.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

it as a matter of course, and grace being developed from it in proportion to the truth of the sensation, as the flower issued from the entireness of the plant, or from all that is necessary to produce it."<sup>63</sup>

But for all its artificiality, the school of Kemble was sometimes referred to as one employing the "natural and classical style of acting."<sup>64</sup> Such seemingly conflicting ideas of what was, or what was not, natural give rise to the belief that perhaps conventionalized vocal patterns and body movements, when well coordinated with the speeches, and employed with ease and grace, may have seemed natural. On the other hand, bearing in mind the comments regarding Kean's style, it might be inferred that vocal patterns and gestures which appeared to be spontaneous and impulsive may have been carefully worked out in detail beforehand. A case in point may be taken from various criticisms of Forrest, who was lauded for the "fidelity of nature" in his portrayals. Alger even notes that some critics condemned Forrest for his "realistic method" and "robust energy," claiming that it made him too "vehemently genuine, his art not far enough removed from material reality . . . , " and lacking grace and delicacy.<sup>65</sup> Moses, however, looked at Forrest's ability as a "natural" actor in a somewhat different light. He said that one went to see Forrest's acting in much the same spirit that he went to see a marvel of nature such as the Mammoth Cave: "Forrest's acting had about it the same show of quality. Outward expression and

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>New England Galaxy, February 23, 1821, p. 78.

<sup>65</sup>William R. Alger, Life of Edwin Forrest (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1877), II, 436.

pose of majesty and power were there, with cavernous depths within, but there seemed to be lacking those qualities of mind and spirit which are the measure of the greatest acting."<sup>66</sup> These contrasts between leading actors and their methods have been made in order to demonstrate the thesis made earlier in this study: that one cannot readily accept, as some students of acting have done, the contemporary writer's opinion that an actor is natural or artificial in his performance until the term itself is explored and defined within the framework of patterns of communication which existed in a given age.

While dealing with the subject of naturalness in acting, it may be well to call attention to an additional point. Keeping in mind that acting styles do not change overnight or abruptly from one period or performer to another, the period provides some indication that there may have been a shift in the direction of a more modern sort of naturalism in acting. For example, a critic, in his review of Hamblin, Cooper, and Booth in Julius Caesar remarked that, although the audience had probably seen each of these roles performed equally well at other times by other actors, it was certainly "not accustomed to such an effective ensemble."<sup>67</sup> While this may be an isolated instance of actors performing in an ensemble manner, rather than exhibiting their talents individually or competitively, it is not so isolated when taken into consideration with other factors. There are comments by the critics to the effect that actors were beginning to leave off their tendency to face the audience

<sup>66</sup>Moses, Forrest, p. 32.

<sup>67</sup>New York Mirror, August 27, 1831, p. 63.

and declaim their speeches. Even so slight a change as an actor's turning to speak to other people on the stage would, therefore, have a more "natural" appearance. It probably did in the mind of the critic who commended Forrest for his delivery of the speech of Othello at the council chamber, and noted he was especially pleased that it was addressed "to the duke and members of the council, as it should have been, and not to the audience."<sup>68</sup> Implicit in this comment is the inference that actors must have generally addressed this speech directly to the audience. A departure, such as Forrest's, can well be said to have been a step in the direction of "naturalness." This might have encouraged audiences and critics to assume the actor was being true to nature, in spite of mechanical or artificial tendencies common to his performance. There are numerous examples which suggest there was a desire for this change. Finn, as Hamlet, for instance, was criticized for facing the audience too much when he should have been looking at the ghost;<sup>69</sup> and Mr. Hughes was advised "to give up the ghost" or study the part more attentively, and keep his eyes fixed upon the characters to whom he appeared and not on the audience.<sup>70</sup>

Another feature of the acting of this period which must be treated in connection with the problem of naturalness, is the common practice of "making points." "Points" were accomplished by means of "explosive" use of voice and sudden mechanical reactions of the body.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., May 3, 1828, p. 339.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., August 14, 1824, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., September 11, 1824, p. 54.

In many actors of the day they were perhaps the prime considerations and were performed in a wholly mechanical manner. Other actors, however, were probably able to make their "points" appear natural through their achievement of them easily, gracefully, and quietly. Charles Kemble, while he was reported to be an actor who worked for "points," passing over "all opportunities to display his power till the proper opportunity comes, and the occasion demands the display."<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, the critic considered Kemble's reading "true to sense and nature."<sup>72</sup> The Mirror also thought Kemble's use of points should be a model for other actors since he not only made them naturally and quietly, but also effectively.<sup>73</sup> A "point" was generally defined, in words of a Mirror critic, as "a certain way of prominently showing particular beauties. . . ."<sup>74</sup> The actor played for these climactic moments when he could reach a "point" and bring down the applause of the house. In fact, some actors appear to have concentrated on them to such an extent that they played the "level" scenes in an indifferent manner. The Mirror reprinted an article from the London Opera Glass which stated that the English performers, especially the tragedians, generally think only of making what they call "points." "They throw all their power into some few explosions, and fancy that any further effort would be thrown away."<sup>75</sup> Kean was said to be an actor who played for

<sup>71</sup>New York Mirror, February 23, 1833, p. 271.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., December 14, 1833, p. 191.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., April 26, 1828, p. 335.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., February 10, 1827, p. 228.



the high moments of a play when he could make a "point," and in the intervals of less intense emotion and action, he was noted to be restless.<sup>76</sup> This device of "making points" was not, however, always approved by the critic. An actor by the name of Barton was commended for seldom aiming at points, which were, in the critic's estimation, detestable, "except in the hands of a fine genius and then they are natural, not sought."<sup>77</sup> Commenting on the excellence of Macready's Hamlet, a critic evidenced a similar view, praising his acting because it did not consist of "a point, a flash, a flat scene, and then another point, and flash, and flat again."<sup>78</sup>

In this examination of theatrical criticisms of "natural" acting, we have tried to show that this criterion bulked large in the criticism of the period. Even so, the many references, seemingly contradictory, make it difficult to fathom what it was the actor did that won him critical acclaim for the naturalness of his acting. In seeking a solution to the problem, we have pointed to the parallel which existed between the standards advocated by the elocutionists to help the public speaker, reader, and actor to acquire naturalness, and those by which the theatrical critic judged the actor. Both critic and elocutionist demanded that the performer ground his art solidly in "nature," that he observe the patterns of actual conversation in his speaking, that he employ lifelike movements in his portrayals, and that he observe and employ the signs of the various emotions as he found them expressed in

<sup>76</sup>Moses, Forrest, p. 28.

<sup>77</sup>New York Mirror, September 25, 1831, p. 95.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., October 21, 1826, p. 103.

real life. Coupled with such advice, however, there was always the corollary that nature, no matter how much it might be depended on to produce the power so necessary to portray the great tragic roles, must nevertheless be refined, ordered, and conformed to the requirements of "art," in order that the actor embody such qualities as smoothness, grace, and ease, along with force, energy, and verisimilitude. ]

## CHAPTER VII

### SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ACTING STYLES AND TECHNIQUES WHICH PREVAILED ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

This study, which has applied elocutionary "patterns of communication" to theatrical criticisms in order to illuminate the styles and techniques of American acting which prevailed from 1815 to 1840, is not one that lends itself to conclusions that can be enumerated in "order categorical" with a quod erat demonstrandum placed at the end. It does, however, call for a series of observations pointing out the standard patterns, so far as they have been defined, to which the actor's pronunciation, vocal usage, bodily action, and emotional expression were expected to conform, and those patterns by which his "fidelity to nature" was judged. Furthermore, some statement should be made of the probable value of this method in a study of acting styles of a former era, and perhaps suggest the usefulness of examining modern acting techniques in the light of acceptable patterns of communication of the present age.

Criticisms of the actor's pronunciation reveal that critics of the period were generally agreed the actor was to conform to the prescriptions for pronunciation offered by the popular dictionaries, a position which echoed the elocutionist's teaching on the subject. Since the dictionaries of Sheridan and Walker were the ones generally referred

to, the standard of pronunciation demanded of the actor was, to some degree, that of the eighteenth century. Thus, the theatrical criticism reflects the conservative tendencies of American pronunciation as pointed out by linguistic scholars. For all the criticism of the actor's pronunciation, it should be said, however, the critic appears to have given the least attention to this element of the actor's delivery. Then too, since a portion of the criticism did not refer to it to any significant degree, we might infer that the actors, American as well as British, had achieved a fairly uniform type of pronunciation. Since British writers were generally rather scornful of American speech, the instances in which they found an American actor's pronunciation acceptable would argue that it was not very different from that heard on the British stage. American criticisms of the British actor did, of course, reflect the American preference for the "flat a" instead of the "broad a." With this exception, and perhaps that of the use of the final r, stage diction was probably fairly uniform.

One of the most difficult elements to reconstruct with regard to an acting style of the past is that of voice. Yet the patterns of vocal usage are essential to a precise understanding of any acting style. The critics' descriptions of vocal usage, when examined in the light of the elocutionists' teachings, provide some indication of what the nineteenth-century actor did with his voice when the critic put the stamp of approval on the transitions, modulations, cadences, inflections, or styles of reading and declamation. It would appear the actor of the period used his voice as a vehicle for display, thrilling audiences of the time with amazing transitions from quiet and tender tones in

sentimental passages to terrific explosions in moments of violent passion. Such an observation is quite in accord with the purpose for which audiences went to the theatre in that period; that is, not necessarily to see the plays, but to be thrilled by the exhibition which the actor made of his talents in familiar roles. The actor was thus in very much the same position as that of the modern opera singer who must be a virtuoso performer. Just as the present-day opera audience waits for the soprano to reach the high note at the end of a well-known aria, theatre audiences in the decade and a half following the end of the War of 1812 went to enjoy, as it were, virtuoso acting. They, too, waited expectantly for these climactic moments when the performer used his voice to demonstrate the maximum emotional content of a scene. Although the critic appraised an actor's vocal technique as an item worthy of admiration in itself, he was also interested in the use of these techniques as a "means" through which the actor was able to bring out the hidden "beauties" and subtle meanings of the dialogue in his reading or declamation. The critic, knowing the plays almost as well as the performers, was able to compare one actor's reading with another's, to record departures from accepted emphases and phrasings, and to call the actor's attention to lapses when he departed too far from conventional practice. In this, the critic might be said to resemble the modern opera critic far more than his present-day dramatic counterpart.

In terms of vocal usage, the actor was essentially a virtuoso performer who used his voice for the sake of making a vocal display. The attention given to vocal exhibitionism led naturally to a style

characterized by certain "bombastic" features. The study indicates that even "a little rant and bombast" were considered, at times, necessary and appropriate to the characters being portrayed, and to the language being spoken. Such playing demanded of the actor, if he were to achieve stardom, that he possess a voice of great compass, flexibility, and volume, one capable of achieving the desired effects and enabling him to compete vocally with the other actors.

The patterns by which the actor communicated through physical activity involved such elements as his stature, and his use of attitude, gesture, and facial expression. The critic, and presumably the audiences as well, expected the actor to possess a physique which was harmonious with the heroic element in the great tragic roles. Some actors, such as Kean, however, were evidently able to compensate for their lack of stature with the power of their voices, the energy of their bodily movements, and the grace and elegance of their gestures. The audience expected the actor to accomplish much of his physical portrayal through the "striking" of attitudes, or physical poses, which could be assumed and held for a short period of time. The actor's ability to move easily and gracefully from one attitude to another was also a regularly employed test of acting skill. Grace and ease of movement, however, were not the only requirements, as the action many times required the actor to possess great agility and physical dexterity. Many of the gestures used during the period were as conventional as those which the elocutionists described in their manuals. Yet, with it all, the actor was measured in terms of his ability to employ such gestures and movements with ease, elegance, and a



"fidelity to nature." Finally, much attention was given to the manner in which the actor employed facial expression, especially in regard to his ability to depict emotion through the use of his eye.

The problem involved in analyzing the actor's method of portraying emotion is closely related to the use of both voice and bodily action, and at the same time necessitates consideration of the problem of "naturalness." Critics and audiences looked to the actor to employ his voice and his physical movements in such a way as to make the most powerful emotional impact. Even inarticulate, or animal-like tones of voice, when they were employed at the "height of passion," were acceptable. It is probable that the actor used many bodily postures and gestures traditionally or conventionally associated with various emotions, since the critic, oriented to popular elocutionary theory, could "read" emotions portrayed by facial expressions, attitudes, and gestures. While the critic's descriptions of gestures lead us to believe that actors employed many of the same or similar gestures which the manuals on elocution recommended as guides to the public speaker, we must remember that the actor was required to manipulate these physical components of his technique so that they appeared natural and spontaneous.

One of the major criteria, if not indeed the prime consideration, by which the actor's excellence was judged was that of his "naturalness." This criterion has been a perpetual "stumbling-block" for students of acting. It would appear from this study that the label natural must be interpreted, if we are to avoid a common error, in the framework of the patterns of a given age. For the period under consideration in this study, it has been shown that the teachers of elocution set as one of

their major aims that of showing the speaker, reader, and actor how to acquire "naturalness" in delivery. The critic interpreted the phrase "follow nature" very much as the elocutionist did in that he took it to mean that the signs by which ideas and emotions were expressed in real life should be observed and employed on the stage. Nevertheless, both believed that nature should be "refined" by "art," and the performer's gestures, vocal patterns, bodily movements, and manner of expressing emotion were to be governed by such rules as would help him acquire grace and ease in their manipulation. Such an observation leads to the belief that even the most "natural" actors of the period employed "means" which were actually highly stylized or conventionalized. It is probable that some actors were more "natural" than others. What is apparent, however, is that actors who have traditionally been labeled "natural," as Kean has been, in reality did not employ a "natural" method in their portrayals. It is also apparent that an actor who probably did use more of the raw material of nature, as Forrest is said to have done, was not necessarily acclaimed over the conventional or traditional player. One point which seems to stand out in this consideration of "fidelity of nature" is that the audiences and critics of that day were, in all likelihood, unable to draw a definite distinction between the "formal" and the "natural" actor. They probably labeled as "natural" portrayal what appeared to be natural, and what was performed with such grace and ease that it seemed to be the product of the actor's spontaneous thinking and feeling.

Another point to be considered when dealing with the problem of naturalness is that this period appeared to be one characterized by

changing styles and techniques. At the outset of the period, the stage was perhaps dominated by the "teapot" style of acting, or one which bore marked similarities to some of its more distinguishing characteristics. From the reviews of the acting examined, it would seem that, as the period progressed, the acting styles became less rigid in this respect. Critics paid more attention to "natural" gestures, "natural" vocal patterns, and "natural" emotional expression, as they began to praise the actor for "conversing" with other actors on the stage, rather than delivering speeches to the audience. As this change progressed, there appeared to be a slight lessening of emphasis on the actor's vocal and bodily techniques, and more stress on the emotional and natural elements.

But beyond these matters of technique, it may be well to ask whether the study indicates there is any particular merit in studying acting styles with reference to prevailing communication patterns. It would appear, on the basis of this examination of theatrical criticism in the light of the standards of delivery as set by the elocutionists, that the method is one that can be used to advantage in attempting to visualize the acting bearing a given label. The labels of "natural," "romantic," "classical," "formal," "neo-romantic," or the like have little significance until we can describe the patterns of voice, bodily action, emotional portrayal, and natural expression which characterize the style. The use of this method in a study of the acting styles of a past age is dependent, of course, upon the availability of a body of material which describes what might be called the "paradigms" of the communicative system of the time. Such a method as this will not solve

all the problems which will occur in the process of studying styles of acting, but it will surely have a distinct contribution to make in helping the student recreate the histrionic art of a former age.

In addition to the fact that this particular method has value in the study of the actor's art of the past, perhaps it may also be used to shed light on modern styles and techniques of acting. It will be granted that instruments of mass communication, the microphone, the moving picture camera, and television have affected, and will continue to affect, the patterns of communication as they exist in the modern age. It is necessary but to mention the influence which the presence of a microphone has on the patterns of the speaker's voice to show that such an instrument can alter a pattern of communication. Furthermore, since the objects nearest the camera lens are enlarged, the motion picture or television actor's patterns of gesture are also different from those he may effectively employ on the legitimate stage. It would appear, too, that there would be value in studying the patterns of emotional portrayal and natural expression as they are affected by these instruments of communication.

While considering the effect of different media on patterns of communication, it might be said that the actor has always been able to adapt himself to the demands of the theatre as it has changed from age to age. The "Artists of Dionysus" in the fifth century, B. C., had to employ far different patterns of communication from those of the Moliere troupe performing at the Petit Bourbon in Paris in the seventeenth century. Also those actors who performed at The Globe in seventeenth-century London followed different patterns of vocal usage and bodily

movement from those to which a modern Broadway audience responds. Beyond these differences, which occur from one period to another, there are others which take place within a given period. For instance, the shadows moving across the panoramic screen at the local Bijou require actors to communicate emotion and to depict nature in a somewhat different fashion, not only from that followed by an actor on the legitimate stage, but also in a manner different from that of those shadows which play across the far smaller screen of the television set in an average living room. But the actor will adapt the patterns of communication inherited from generations of players, as he has always done, and he will remold and remake them into the images which audiences of his own time will accept and to which they will accord a due measure of applause.

The question of evaluating the product of performers of the past is one which admits of an answer only in relative terms. An inquiry as to whether we may have lost, in the demand today for "realism" and "naturalism" in acting, the power and excitement which the actor injected into his performances of the nineteenth century becomes somewhat meaningless in view of a fundamental premise of this study, that a style or technique of acting is of, and for, its own age and must be interpreted within the framework of the communicative conventions which that age accepts. All too often the tendency is to look back upon great performers of the past with a nostalgia for their performances, without realizing that, with an audience oriented to different conventions, these actors might appear only ridiculous. Practically no opera-goer who heard Caruso, however, will admit his peer among contemporary singers,



nor will those who recall performances of the "divine Sarah" concede like power to any modern actress. The present generation of play-goers, nevertheless, finds excitement in present-day actors and their performances. The critic or student with an "authoritarian" outlook may mourn the loss of "standards" of stage diction, of vocal and body culture by actors of this era, and of the yardsticks by which he might measure accurately the power of an actor's emotional expression, or judge the quality of his realistic portrayal. But we cannot apply to twentieth century acting the standards which the nineteenth century esteemed, any more than we can demand of our contemporary public speakers that they follow the patterns employed by nineteenth-century orators. Although such prescriptions cannot be recommended for modern actors, it might be beneficial for the modern student of acting, obsessed with the minutiae of the "Method," to realize that there have been actors, and remarkable ones, who, employing vastly different methods, moved audiences tremendously in their own day and achieved for themselves secure niches in the actor's hall of fame. It may be a chastening thought, as well, for those who presume to instruct actors in methods and techniques that, while there will always be in the next generation and the next century those critics and play-goers who will look back to the theatre of our own time and long for the "good old days," there will inevitably be a far larger group of younger devotees of theatre who will disparage the older actors and find their enthusiasms in those who employ new and modern techniques which conform to the patterns of communication evolved to serve the purposes of their age.



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The writer was born July 8, 1914, at Gordon, Texas. He received the B. A. degree from McMurry College in 1936. After teaching for six years in the public schools of Texas, he entered the service of the United States government as Spanish translator. He returned to teaching in 1945, holding positions at Augusta Military Academy and the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. He received the M. A. from Northwestern University in 1948. He has held the position of assistant professor of speech and drama at Trinity University, associate professor of speech and drama at McMurry College, and chairman of the Speech and Drama Department at Virginia Interment College. From 1950 to 1955, he was employed on the regular staff of the Barter Theatre, State Theatre of Virginia, as Scene Designer. He has also served as a member of the Executive Council of the Southeastern Theatre Conference, and as a member of the Planning Board of the Virginia Highland Arts and Crafts Festival. He began his doctoral studies at the University of Florida in 1956 and held graduate assistantships in theatre from 1956 to 1958. He was awarded a Graduate School Fellowship for the term of 1958-59. He is a member of Alpha Chi National Scholarship Society, the Speech Association of America, and in 1956 was listed in Who's Who in the South and Southwest.

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of that committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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